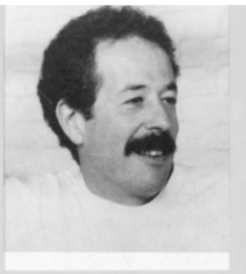
Film Quarterly



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Totally Recalling Arnold • Menzel • Kieślovski

Authorship and Cultural Politics • Theory of Theory

Born on the Fourth of July • *Jesus of Montreal*

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Errata

We apologize to the authors for two recent errors: we omitted from the Contributors listing in the Winter issue Darius Cooper, who teaches in the English Department at San Diego Mesa College; and we failed to catch a misquote in William van Wert's Summer issue article on *House of Games*—what Mike actually says to Margaret at the airport is not "like a dog to its father," but "like a dog to its vomit."

Fred Glass

Totally Recalling Arnold

Sex and Violence in the New Bad Future

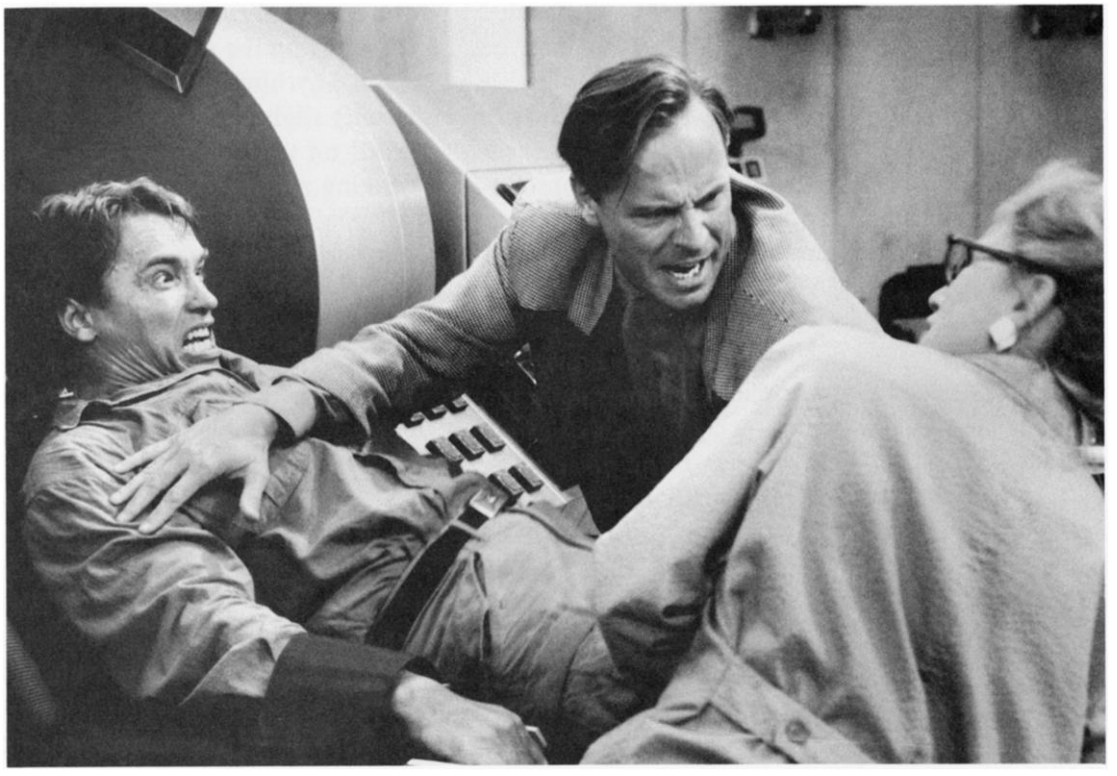
Total Recall cost $60 million dollars, the second most expensive film ever produced. (*Rambo 3* was the most expensive.) As one would expect from the muscular budget, special effects play a leading role in this Arnold Schwarzenegger extravaganza. Totally recalling several movies produced over the last decade, Dutch expatriate filmmaker Paul Verhoeven (*Robocop*) has put together a slick, fast-paced vehicle for his bulging star, who previously flexed his way through two other science fiction scenarios, *Running Man* and *Terminator*. But the film—the latest product of the fertile SF subgenre "New Bad Future" (NBF)—offers something more to the critical viewer than visual pyrotechnics and pumped-up action sequences.

NBF films tell stories about a future in the grip of feverish social decay. While some posit a post-nuclear barbarism (as in the Mad Max trilogy, starring Mel Gibson), most (e.g., *Bladerunner, Outlands, Robocop, Alien/s*) envision the world that will emerge *without* such an apocalyptic break with history.

The NBF scenario typically embraces urban expansion on a monstrous scale, where real estate capital has realized its fondest dreams of cancerous growth. Amnesia-stricken characters and advanced gadgetry tangle against the backdrop of a ruined natural environment, while drug gangs compete with private security forces to provide the most plentiful opportunities for employment. The heroes, by themselves or with rebellious groups, go up against the corruption and power of the ruling corporations, which exercise a media-based velvet glove/iron fist social control. This repressive structure of society provides the films' rationale for lots of action and bloodletting. Despite their penchant for gratuitous gore as well as other problems (poorly conceived women characters, dialogue generally less lofty than Shakespearean) many NBF films tilt toward an intelligent, leftish politics, leavened with a sense of (black) humor. Human/machine interfaces figure prominently, often through androids or cyborgs didactically presented as more human than the human characters. Indeed, central to the concerns of the NBF is the question of what *is* human, with moral, political, and philosophical discourses spinning around that axis. Copious special effects undergird construction of these diverse elements into the New Bad Future.

In an earlier article I discussed the possibility that NBF films shared a social-psychological project: helping to ease their audience's entry from shattered past expectations of the future (personal and social) into what the future is turning out to be.[1] The operative concept was suggested by English psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, the inventor of the term "transitional object." Winnicott described the phenomenon of small children powerfully projecting their feelings into intimately familiar toys, blankets, etc., in order to simultaneously express and defend against basic anxieties, particularly those involved with separation from the mother. Neither completely internal nor external, the transitional object helps establish an individual identity to supercede the merged, fluid baby/mother relationship of infancy. The object is "transitional" because it allows the child, through play and imaginary activities, to work through conflict necessary for change and growth, to become able to push from one stage of emotional development to the next.

The concept rapidly moved beyond clinical psychoanalytic circles into popular usage. Winnicott



Strapped to a threatening machine in a new kind of travel service: memory implant procedure in *Total Recall*

then proposed the intriguing, if tentative, notion that transitional objects may be considered a model for understanding broader cultural issues. He drew a loose parallel between individual psychological development facilitated through use of a transitional object, and the collective metamorphoses of groups within a society faced with change. Characters and situations in theater, paintings, storytelling or films might reveal something of the collective psychological process that occurs when an audience engages with a "cultural transitional object," especially in periods of social conflict and structural transformation of a culture. His hope was that cultural theorists might take up the idea and apply it to their work in ways that, as a nonspecialist, he could only intuit.

In discussing *Robocop*, I argued that the character of the cyborg might best be understood as a cultural transitional object. Like an early-eighties SF subgenre starring computers run amok,[2] NBF films provide viewers with an unconscious vehicle for dealing with the collective issues raised by the transition, under capitalist control, from a relatively stable national, mechanical/industrial society to a new and uncertain transnational information technology order. The social anxiety of job dislocation through the wanton destruction of the old industrial base of the American economy is compounded by the felt experience of millions of workers who have to retool themselves to survive. The cyborg, part human and part computer, struggling to achieve a meaningful identity, in this context becomes a character with which a sizeable fraction of the audience can identify, albeit mostly at an unconscious level. Other, similar relationships rooted in rapid economic and technological transformations can only be hinted at here—for instance, older people who rely on high-tech medicine to cheat death for a few more years, or young people obsessively playing video games. Women characters are often anxious objects, too, representing the fears of both women and men at their evolving role in the workforce and culture. For all these individuals and social groupings, NBF figures might well be understood as cultural transitional objects.

Total Recall features such characters, and we will take a look at them in a moment. Part of my interest in the film, however, is that it clearly poses some theoretical difficulties for the category of the cultural transitional object. Consideration of these difficulties has led me to formulate another category to explain some of the problems. I call this the "cultural fetish object," for reasons that will become clear shortly.

At the beginning of *Total Recall*'s complicated plot, construction worker Douglas Quaid (played by Schwarzenegger), experiences an inexplicably powerful longing to go for a vacation on Mars in the year 2084. When his wife (Sharon Stone) refuses to go, he follows the advice of TV commercials and enlists the aid of a company, Rekall, Inc., specializing in the implantation of vacation "memories" into its clients' brains. But something goes wrong, and Quaid has a "schizoid embolism." The company dumps the unconscious Quaid into a taxi. Shortly after regaining consciousness he is set upon by four men, one of whom, a coworker, calls him "Hauser" and tells him he has blown his cover. After dispatching the thugs with Schwarzeneggerian aplomb, he goes home, only to find his wife attempting to kill him, too. She tells him he is really Hauser, a top security operative for Cohaagen (Ronny Cox), the evil capitalist ruler of Earth's mining colony on Mars. Hauser knew too much for Cohaagen to allow him to stick around. The political leader of the mutant worker rebels, Kuato, wants to capture Quaid for the same reasons. Quaid's memory had been wiped out, she informs him, and he had been sent to earth to lead a new life.

What Quaid *isn't* told is that Cohaagen has planted Hauser on earth (complete with secret agent "wife" watching him) in order to return incognito to Mars and gain the confidence of Kuato, and then to innocently lead Cohaagen's forces to the rebel's fortress. Since the mutants possess telepathic powers, there was no other way for Hauser to accomplish this except by completely giving up his original identity. Quaid goes to Mars, joins the rebels, and inadvertently leads Cohaagen's soldiers to Kuato, who is killed. Quaid and Melina (Rachel Ticotin), the prostitute-revolutionary he falls in love with, are captured, but they break free of the machines that will erase their identities, find the ancient Martian technology for making air on the barren planet, and after killing lots of bad guys, including Cohaagen, set off the chain reaction that allows the movie to end with a spectacular special effects sequence and several unanswered questions.

Various NBF constructions resurface in *Total Recall*. The genre's screenwriters frequently target advertisements, for instance, for their omnipresent manipulations. Ridley Scott achieved some of his most stunning visual triumphs creating ads of the future in *Bladerunner*, and Verhoeven's own *Robocop* sends up the ad industry's relentless eagerness to sell anything by any means. Its ads, in 1999, are only slightly more inappropriate than those inflicted on us today. *Brazil*, although not strictly speaking a NBF film, presents us with an endless wall of billboards masking off polluted landscapes from the view of people in the street. In *Total Recall*, Verhoeven uses advertising iconography in a high proportion of scenes, but plays it, for the most part, absolutely straight. They are just oppressively *there*, the actual logos for today's corporate products, as inescapable for the mutants as cigarette and booze billboards for inner city dwellers in America. (Two exceptions: the TV ads, again, are satirized; and Verhoeven indulges in an irresistible sight-gag in the form of a newspaper street box, painted white, with a red "Mars Today" logo.) The passage of one hundred years does not exist for this corner of Mars's colonial culture; the anachronism is startling in its familiarity. The device invites the audience into a comparison of fantasy future with present reality.

Consistent with NBF convention, high-tech toys appear conspicuously throughout the first part of *Total Recall*. But these applications—wall-size TV, an exercise holo, touch-sensitive nail-polish—stick closely to the horizons of current consumer commodities; like the ads, they "recall" the world of the filmgoer. Conveying an epistemological position on social use of technologies, the toys imply disgust at their trivialization and, while the mutants suffer, potential wasted. The most notable example is Rekall, Inc., which shrinkwraps an impressive scientific understanding of the intricate relations of psychology and biology into mental home-movies.

As for cultural transitional objects, no robots, androids, or cyborgs show up in *Total Recall*, except for the "johnny-taxi driver," essentially a Disneyesque automaton. Aliens only appear in a trace of the ancient, vanished Martian civilization: a fabulous air-making technology. Instead, the role of the "other" who reveals through its fragmented, refracting mirror the true nature of humanity is assumed in *Total Recall* by the mutant underclass. Once just like the other humans, they make the film's moral/political point that otherness is not license for abuse. As such they are a genre-coded substitute for aliens, and refer to real-world codes of otherness (race, sex, and class).

The disfigured faces and bodies of mutant workers in the Mars colony (created by make-up artist Rob Bottin) result from deficiencies in their domed living quarters, which leak cosmic rays inside. When the mutants demonstrate their opposition to exploitation by Cohaagen, the evil corporate ruler, he withholds air in their sector of the colony. Thus the mutants' inhuman bodily appearance is a continuous reminder to the viewer of technological issues: control over the most important technologies on the planet, the air machines and domes, as well as a reminder of the real inhumanity of their oppressor, is part of the mutant make-up.

Buttressing this technological reading of the mutants is an overlay of nuclear anxiety. Although the alien machinery is not brought into use until the final apocalyptic scenes, we learn earlier that Quaid's repressed knowledge of its existence can assist the rebels, led by the extraordinary mutant Kuato, to overthrow Cohaagen. At the same time we find that it is a nuclear technology. Associations with nuclear radiation remain in the background of the narrative, only revealed indirectly through the metaphoric discourse of mutancy. This is typical of NBF films, which have carried the more crudely expressed nuclear anxieties of fifties SF cinema forward into the last decades of the twentieth century (even if partially displaced onto other threatening varieties of big science).

The mutants represent the distortion of human potential under authoritarian rule. The image of deformity that brings the inside of the body erupting out of its skin presents a literal sense of the pressures toward rebellion experienced by an oppressed people or class. Their solidarity with one another is partly based on their shared misfortune; it is also clearly rooted in their political understanding of who has done this to them and the reasons why. Yet the writers (*Alien* authors Ronald Shusett and Dan O'Bannon, plus Gary Goldman and Steve Pressfield) don't allow their mutancy theme to sink under its own symbolic weight. The film's cruel sense of humor surfaces, for instance, in the encounter between Quaid and a particularly ugly mutant, who tells him, "Hauser, you've got some nerve showing your face around here," to which the hero replies, "You should talk."

Total Recall, like *Robocop* and *Running Man* before it, provides lessons on the politics of the media controlled by a dominant group, demonstrating

Total Recall: A mutant accosts Quaid, who is trying to find out why people want to kill him.

how commercial TV's presentation of the social "other" frames its audience's understanding. In scenes separated widely in the narrative, Quaid watches the news on his wall-sized TV; commentators rip the "terrorists" who commit violent acts without reason. Faceless, they are as unseen in the news footage as in the hotel on Mars where they work. The TV clips dehumanize them. Later, in scenes familiar to anyone from an advanced capitalist country who has vacationed in the third world, tourists from earth are oblivious to the experience of the colonial workers who serve them. Sequences where Quaid encounters the mutant workers later in the film give us the faces the news doesn't show and tourists don't see, and tell their side of the story. (The mutants are more or less an open revolutionary sign: fill in Irish, South African, Palestinian. In the moment of Quaid's capture by the mutants, one of the mutant revolutionaries is briefly seen wearing a kaffiyeh.) Eisenteinian associative montage isn't necessary to make the connec-

tions; the faces of the mutants shown underneath expository dialogue about air as a commodity create an internal montage the Soviet director would have approved.

Likewise, Schwarzenegger's body itself has something to say to us. Armorplated with muscle, almost unhuman—not unlike Murphy in *Robocop* and Schwarzenegger as the cyborg in *Terminator*—Quaid is the picture of perfect pumpitude. Verhoeven knows the audience's memory of NBF films and their associations in particular with Schwarzenegger. Supposed superhuman strength, in human and cyborg form alike, defines his onscreen persona.

But there are some other, unconscious relationships the film establishes with the audience through the medium of Schwarzenegger's body. Schwarzenegger, both functionally and as an iconic signifier, may be understood as a swollen penis, throbbing his way through the receptive material of the narrative. For certain definable sectors of the audience, the meaning of this resemblance is clear enough. I attended a full-house first-night screening, in a working-class suburban multiplex with *Total Recall* on two screens. The average age of the mixed ethnic crowd's members was perhaps 18. Quaid's feats of bone-crunching, gut-spilling, or limb-removing violence were met with great approval by the young male voices around me. Less universal, but perhaps equally intense were the misogynist misreadings of some scenes. Certainly for a large percentage of adolescent males in the audience the female characters were as much "other" as the mutants. A shout of "Kill the bitch!" was merely one of many vocal instances of audience participation punctuating the screening. An interpretation of Schwarzenegger's iconic presence as an unconsciously presented erect male member would not contradict the behavior of young working-class male members of the audience.

Schwarzenegger's body represents a possible twin to Winnicott's suggestive category, one with less benevolent implications for understanding the social psychology of audiences at NBF films. The persistent (if cartoonish) violence and hormonal responses of the viewer to the action continuously threaten to wash away the progressive political themes. The politics and the action-adventure format of NBF films war internally with each other, a meta-narrative battle that for most viewers (since most are teenaged, with relatively unsophisticated politics) ends with victory for the wrong side. Schwarzenegger's wish-fulfillment heroics, rather than an appreciation of the worldview of the NBF, attracts these viewers, and remains the focus of their attention. If a political message *is* absorbed, it keeps closely to the shadows of their unconscious, where the fears and hopes on which political manipulation thrives tend to stay in our depoliticized culture.

Thus the difference: a *cultural transitional object* might help lift an individual through his/her fear of social conflicts to an alleviation of the internal anxiety corresponding to the threatening social entity (e.g., automation of my job) and a possible resolution, e.g., getting retrained on computers. The main character in *E.T.* or Max 404 in *Android* come to mind: we feel good about these human-like characters; they create a warm affect in the audience. A character such as Quaid/Schwarzenegger may in the long run act more as a *cultural fetish object*. It too acts as a temporary palliative for social fears, but only as a "patch": in an attempt to alleviate anxiety, reality is disavowed and distorted, reinforcing patterns of behavior that can lead fears of social disempowerment (castration anxieties) to their realization in social decay and barbarism in the world (e.g., through a passive identification with violent revenge fantasies).[3]

As in *Robocop*, the hero is an amnesiac, and the plot evolves from Quaid's attempt to recover his identity. The common NBF fusion of detective and SF genres (pioneered by Philip K. Dick, author of the short story "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" on which *Total Recall* is loosely based) leads to a paranoid narrative structure where Quaid stumbles into dangerous, unfamiliar yet half-remembered places and people who know him but whom he doesn't know in return. His lack of memory contrasts sharply with the collective memory of the oppressed mutant-workers.

This aspect of *Total Recall* recalls *Bladerunner*. The replicants' "memories," implanted at "birth," establish lives they've never lived, right down to photo albums of family and friends who have never existed. For Quaid the identity loss has occurred more recently. But for replicants, Robocop, and Quaid alike, their missing identity is a symbolic castration, a loss of power over their lives that must be regained.

In all these films the audience can relate to the situation. It reverberates with us because as individuals we are always attempting to recall things we have repressed. Indeed, according to psychoanalytic theory, our adult identity is based on a successful process of repressing early relationships with parents and siblings, most of which we experienced through the mediation of intensely charged emotional fantasies, baggage too heavy to carry around in our conscious mind but too potent to entirely lose. So we compromise by pushing those memories down into the unconscious, where they help shape the patterns of our lives in ways beyond our waking understanding. We are all amnesiacs, both in this individual-psychological sense and in a broader representation: as victims of social amnesia, the peculiar anti-historical mechanism of our culture that works to keep rulers and ruled in their places.[4]

The film brings some of that to the surface in two scenes. A psychiatrist appears in Quaid's hotel room on Mars. The shrink informs Quaid that he is not where he thinks he is, but actually sitting in the high-tech chair in the office of Rekall, Inc. on earth, where his adventures began, and he is experiencing a "schizoid-embolism." The psychiatrist has been implanted in Quaid's mind to bring him back. As a lowly construction worker, it stands to reason that Quaid likes this exciting life as a secret agent on Mars better than his proletarian existence on earth, but he needs to snap out of his psychotic delusion and resume his life. The psychiatrist brings in Quaid's "wife," who quaveringly asks her honey to come home with her, and asks him to take a pill as a "symbolic" commitment to return to the real world. Quaid can't decide if he's being mind-fucked or not.

The scene is remarkable for two different reasons. It threatens to pull the narrative rug out from under us. The shrink's reasoning is impeccable; he almost convinces us along with Quaid. It fits snugly within the premises of the plot, and creates a distinctly uncomfortable feeling for the viewer: have I been had all this time too? The paranoid structure of the plot creates the context for our gullibility, and reinforces audience identification with Quaid: our experience of the film could be as false as his experience of his own life, as treacherous as his memories. The moment is almost Brechtian in the way it breaks the narrative and interrogates our underlying assumptions about what we've been watching. (Brecht would also appreciate the way it presents a worker and corrupt authority figure in a classic confrontation.)

However, it is the "almost" that is operative here. The mood snaps when an extreme close-up zeroes in on a bead of sweat trickling down the psychiatrist's face. Quaid decides: he shoots the psychiatrist in the forehead. Resolving the scene this way brings us back into the narrative we'd almost lost. But it does so in a manner that reiterates a defining contradiction for NBF films: the curious amalgam of progressive politics and action adventure narrative rooted in intense violence, which may or may not be of the redemptive sort. What will the audience remember most when it leaves the theater: the politics, psychology, and philosophy—or the blood?

We might ask this question of the sequence when Kuato interrogates Quaid. In this strangely moving confrontation, the heart of the narrative, Quaid is led into a room in the rebel's headquarters. He is warned that Kuato is a mutant, and not to be afraid when he sees him. The man who led him into the room turns away; he opens his shirt front. The camera, at the man's back, witnesses the emergence of a small hand with four fingers from the man's stomach. He slowly turns around again, all but unconscious, his stomach the point of fusion with a mutant child, half-embedded in the man's flesh, neither completely external nor completely internal to his body. The creature is reminiscent of the starchild at the end of *2001*, and of *E.T.*, but also recalls the horrifying violation of bodily integrity in *Alien*. Kuato (for that is who the child is) asks Quaid to reveal what he knows. Quaid says he doesn't remember what he knows. Kuato, a better psychotherapist than the Rekall, Inc. company doctor, then leads Quaid on a journey into his own buried past.

The camera plunges into this memory of Quaid's on a vertiginous, minute-long continuous shot replete with dizzying movements forward, to the sides, sharply upward and steeply down. We are brought into a cleft in the rocks and then a passageway, and from there into an enormous cavern beneath the surface of Mars, containing machinery of fantastic scale. Seamlessly combining extensive mattes and miniatures, the shot—together with an almost religious musical sound track—builds on the

previous moment of confrontation with Kuato to invoke a sense of mystery revealed. We witness what Quaid remembers: Cohaagen had found the Martians' nuclear reactors in his mines, used to melt the planet's frozen core and create a livable atmosphere on the surface. One puzzle in the plot has been solved; but the sense of awe remains, shaped by the sheer scale and grandeur of the alien technology and by the geologic sense of time passed since its installation eons ago. When we are at last lifted out of Quaid's memory, in a final bit of sage advice, Kuato tells Quaid that to remember is not as important as to act.

Its primacy for the narrative aside, the scene extends our reading of cultural transitional objects in NBF films. Kuato is both child and man, a mutant, the leader of the rebellion. It is hinted (although never explicitly confirmed) that he resembles the Martians of long ago; the handprint on the startup device of the nuclear reactor has space for only four fingers. Despite his somewhat gruesome appearance, Kuato is gentle, powerful, and on the right side of the political struggle of the red planet. As a complex, multilevelled ideological sign, Kuato cannot help but remind me of the remark of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci during the dark period of fascism between the wars: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born. Within this interregnum, a variety of morbid symptoms appear." What better image to represent that sentiment than the unconscious mutant man with the child halfway in and halfway out of his body? The structure of inside/outside, as well as its function in raising and blowing off our social fears through dense references to technology, distortions of humanity, psychotherapy and "aborted" revolution, makes Kuato, even more explicitly than his brother and sister mutants, the central cultural transitional object of the film. For male viewers especially, the image draws some of its power from unconscious, primitive fears of and wishes for childbirth, and from anxieties originating with women's changing cultural role (e.g., if the women are working does that mean we'll have to have babies, and how?).

The camerawork gives us some material to mull over in terms of a cultural fetish object, too. We enter a crack in a surface, move along a passageway, and discover a room inside; it would not be stretching things to note the resemblance of our cinematic journey with that of the imagination of a man regarding a woman's body.

Let's stop here for a moment and review a few salient points from the psychoanalytic discussion of fetishism. Classical psychoanalytic theory today is but the starting point for understanding fetishism; object relations and feminist re-readings of Freud have contributed to a large, contradictory body of writings on the topic. For our purpose here —developing the idea of the cultural fetish object as a category for film criticism—I have selected the following features of the discussion.

Fetishism emerges out of the experience of a child whose psychological development has been distorted at an early age. In classical theory the child fetishist-to-be, nearly always male—struggling with conflicts around issues of passivity/activity, submission/domination, and genital injury—views his mother's genitals and fears that bodily injury has removed her penis. He worries the same thing can happen to him. In defense he unconsciously fantasizes a phallus for his mother in order to ward off castration anxiety, and is continuously engaged in a struggle to deny and distort the visual "memory" of his penis-less mother. The struggle leads him to displace his anxiety by creating a drama in which he endows an object, the fetish, with magical features to protect him from these fears stirred up by the "memory" of the mother's "mutilated" genitals: yes, don't worry, mother has a penis. The object constitutes a "patch" over this crisis in the boy's sexual development, and later on the adult man needs to enact the drama with the fetish to have sex. Fetishes are generally hard objects, in keeping with their assigned role as replacement phallus.[5]

The pathogenesis of fetishism described here may be an accurate one for men. But contemporary psychoanalytic thought no longer believes that women, while clinically displaying a "castration anxiety," experience their own psychosexual development in the same way as men. Some writers argue reasonably that castration fears experienced by girls, while based in roughly parallel developments, are also specific to female anatomy and its psychological internalization, e.g., instead of worrying about something being cut off, their fears are of injury from penetration or closure, or of other forced submissions. For children of both sexes, however, if the wrong preconditions are in place, the child's visual apprehension of relatively enormous adult genitalia can work with an unconscious fear of genital injury to distort normal psychological develop-

ment. One result can be fetishism.

As with cultural transitional objects, I am not arguing for anything like a complete homology between fetish theory and cultural fetishism. Rather, the theory opens up possibilities for suggestive analogies between individual psychology and society in reading film narrative. The audience for NBF films is receptive to a narrative constructed around an unconscious fetishistic psychology because they, in their daily lives, continuously witness the exercise of power without participating in it except at the receiving end. This results in something like a social castration anxiety. We fear what we cannot control, especially the bigness and complexity of new technologies reshaping the social and cultural maps of work and leisure. Like the psychologically vulnerable child who internalizes and distorts the image of mother or father's genitals at a crucial point in development, working people today find themselves in a window of vulnerability regarding their relationships with technology and employment. They wear cheap digital watches, but do not control their time at work. They own VCRs, but do not produce films like *Total Recall*. They may use microcomputers, but watch helplessly as millions of jobs are automated out from under them. A sexualized media environment, especially through ads, entices youth; but the age of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases forces these natural and artificially stimulated impulses into indirect and sometimes distorted channels of expression. Intimacy and mature sexual relationships seem as unattainable for many adolescents as they often are for the central characters in NBF films.

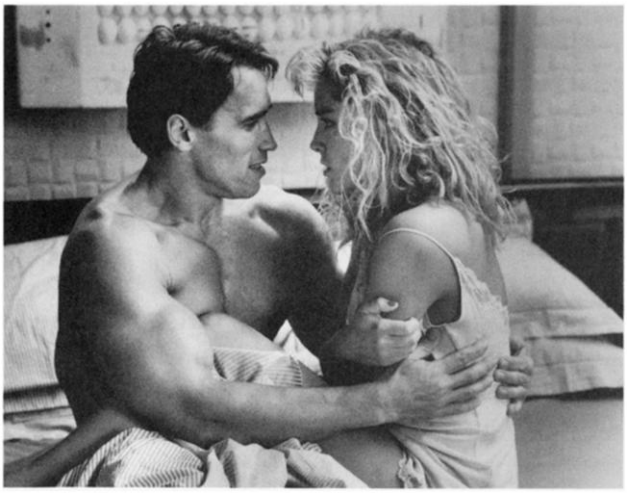
It should come as no surprise that this anxious set of social circumstances requires narrative/mythic symbolization, both for individuals and for the broader culture. More distressing might be the realization that such a process of semiosis is achieved through a regressive mechanism, a social psychology utilizing cultural fetish objects. Or perhaps it works this way: the stronger and/or more privileged members of the audience can take cultural signifiers and internalize them as cultural transitional objects; while those without access to the same material and psychological resources find themselves in a fetishizing process instead. Different audiences are addressed with the same signifier, with the result that the character/sign is simultaneously recreated as alternative signifieds for different social groups.

Take, for example, Arnold's body (please). The revelation of the hidden Martian machinery brings to light the prize sought after by Kuato and withheld by Cohaagen. It also reveals a portion of the fetishist's unconscious, that fearful journey into the absence of the penis. "Inside" Arnold's body (POV Quaid) when he makes that journey, we traverse his memory with Kuato, following the camera into the Martian cavern's secret. Quaid's memory (of his identity as Hauser, of the air-making Martian nuclear technology), the missing/repressed element of the narrative, thus paradoxically hides its own substance as well: Arnold's body/erect penis, the fetish embodiment of the film's iconography, and the patch over our fear of a technological society out of our control. Likewise, the dream/reality narrative hook replicates a fetishistic element for the audience: the "here/not here" protection against castration anxiety.

This rather literal application of psychoanalytic fetish theory to the narrative is not necessary in order to understand the function of the cultural fetish object in *Total Recall*, since the analogic model —disempowerment of workers through the removal from their control of life-giving resources and technologies (both in real life, for the audience, and in the film, with Cohaagen's savage actions against the worker colony)—is with a *social* castration anxiety. Yet I find it interesting and supportive of the cultural fetish object hypothesis that the narrative material for a more complete match-up is there.

We might expect the unconscious experience to work this way for the men in the audience, at least. Quaid/Schwarzenegger is the cultural fetish object, constructing that point of view for the audience, because he has seen the mother naked (the journey into the cavern representing the male exploration of a woman's body, bolstered by the life-giving properties of the technology inside the cavern/womb); his memory of what he has seen is repressed and displaced by his new identity as a construction worker on earth, i.e., into his muscular body; which works to restore what he has lost through symbolic castration (loss of identity) by reappropriating the Martian technology for the mutant workers' use, that is, restoring what *they* had lost to their own castration by Cohaagen.

However, the magically invulnerable fetish object is not limited to Arnold's body. As with the cyborg characters in other films, the relationship



Quaid and his wife

between human and machine itself is part of the transitional object/fetish object constellation. Quaid's action in recovering the air-making technology, placing his hand on the slab in the right spot (with its missing finger) can be read as the workers reclaiming their phallus, and the rock's hardness as part of the imaginary construction of the cultural fetish object. (It could also be argued that the hidden/revealed element of fetishism is represented by Quaid's holo-projector.)

The two main women characters, too, his "wife" and Melina, are split-off elements of the same function, "phallic women," whose bodies represent the same psychological forces in the narrative. One evil, one good, they are literally "strong women characters," with their strength, like Quaid/Schwarzenegger's, mostly of the physical variety. This thread of peculiarly macho-militarist feminism runs through NBF films: think of Sigourney Weaver's Ripley in *Aliens* and the Sarah Connor character in *Terminator*.

The fear of women—"strong" or otherwise—implicit in a fetishistic psychology erupts continuously in *Total Recall*. In three scenes the unconscious material is powerful enough that it must be deflected in jokes.

Rekall, Inc. technicians give Quaid drugs and work with him to match his fantasies with their preset programmed female types so that he will have had a good time on his "vacation." Drowsily he responds to their queries: athletic or voluptuous? Sleazy or demure? He slurs his words as he goes under the anaesthetic, "Demure . . . [he corrects himself] . . . sleazy." What men *really* want is noted by the significant glance between techs. Later, just before Quaid shoots his bad "wife," she pleads with him, "But I'm your wife." His comment, "Consider this a divorce," gets a big crowd reaction, mostly misogynist. And when Quaid rescues Melina from the memory-erasing machine, which is supposed to make the prostitute/revolutionary passive, as women are meant to be (a clear enough image of castration), she responds daintily to his query "Melina, are you still you?" with "Gee, I don't know, honey, what do you think?" before she laughs, letting the worried Quaid know she hasn't been lobotomized yet.

A fairly complex bit, the last joke only works for those in the audience who share its assumptions that women shouldn't be disempowered. It tells us that Melina is a self-conscious feminist. It's the only such moment for her in the script, however. Adding to what we already know about her, that makes her a revolutionary prostitute feminist. Hmmm. Here, as in other moments in *Total Recall*, we become aware of the gap between action-adventure conventions of NBF writing (particularly the limits of female roles) and the politics of the writer and/or director. Things get a little awkward, but move so quickly we hardly have time to notice.

Much of the dizzying pace of the film has to do with the editing. A couple of associative match cuts let us know that Verhoeven is not unaware of the classical language of the cinema. The opening scenes of the movie conclude with Quaid and his wife making love. Cut to the next morning: Schwarzenegger making breakfast with a hand-held mixer is crude, boys' humor, but it *is* a piece of associative montage. Likewise with a more serious idea later on. An enraged Cohaagen kicks over his fish tank, leaving the creatures flopping around on the floor of his office; cut to the workers' quarter, as they starve for air. Both sequences are pure silent-film editing.

It is during the final apocalyptic sequence and the scenes leading up to it, however, where the editing and ideology of the film work most closely together. Under cover of a grand action-adventure spectacular closure, Verhoeven delivers a political treatise on technology and humanity that pours on the ideas even while it begs at least as many questions as it raises.

Having killed Cohaagen's chief henchman in the

most disarmingly grotesque bit of violence in the film, Quaid rises in an elevator to the place he had envisioned with Kuato's help. There, on a platform far above the floor of the cavern and close to the surface of Mars, he finds the "switch" to turn on the ancient Martian nuclear air-making machinery: a rock slab with the four-fingered imprint of a hand on top. But as Quaid approaches the slab Cohaagen appears with a gun. In the ensuing battle the dictator inadvertently shoots out the seal of the dome, and the two adversaries, as well as Melina, get sucked outside; but not before Quaid manages to place his hand on the rock, starting up the reactor.

We are then treated to a noisy, colorful display of explosions across the planet. Earth tourists watch the shock wave roll across a plain to their hotel bar window vantage and knock them to the floor; precious air is explosively pushed up through the planet's crust to stream into Mars's thin atmosphere, filling the surface with the stuff of breath (and the lungs of Melina and Quaid, saving them from the eye-popping death that befell Cohaagen); the air-starved workers underground receive a new lease on life; the top of the mountain in which the machinery is anchored blows off and sends an enormous column of air rushing onto the surface of the planet; all amid lots of breaking glass, writhing people, and subexplosions. As an added benefit, afterglow to the orgasmic sequence, the murky red atmosphere of Mars dissipates before the rush of oxygen and gets replaced with clear blue skies. Melina and Quaid, revived, wander hand in hand to the top of a mountain and either look over something like the river Jordan to the promised land or re-enact Adam and Eve leaving Eden. (We're not sure which; but we *know* it's biblical.) At the final iris, just before the last clinch, Quaid is struck by a frightening thought: "What if this is all a dream after all?" "Then you better hurry and kiss me before you wake up." The screen fades to white.

There are a number of ways to interpret all this, expensively designed by Simi Valley-based Dream Quest (*Predator, The Abyss*). The reference to nuclear holocaust, displaced throughout the film into the mutancy theme, goes explicit with the shock wave, enormous explosion, nuclear reactor and cloud rushing up over the mountain. Yet this atomic blast brings peace, justice, and blue skies. The latter, along with the mountain top blowing off, suggests less the powers of technological intervention than forces of nature, volcanic eruption and earthquake. But the newly created fresh clean air (produced by nuclear reactors!) also turns on our experience of pollution: from murky red skies to blue, an ecological dream realized. Or is the event more reminiscent of a divine wrath, a literal apocalypse, complete with people rising from the dead (the air-starved workers) and a new vision of a promised land? Or perhaps a metaphor for the cataclysm of revolution, with the wealthy tourists knocked to their knees, corporate ruler Cohaagen dead, and the means of keeping the workers down, control over the air supply, abolished: the freeing of the forces of production for the benefit of the workers?

None of these ideas are delineated very carefully or completely in the final scenes of *Total Recall*. Sketched in between the rapid-fire edits, a jumble of partially realized themes and images run riot and then subside in Quaid and Melina's kiss. And yet perhaps it is possible to distinguish some ideological particulars here.

The happy endings of NBF films tend to be unbelievable and forced, especially given the internal logic of the genre. They only work because their audiences accept the convention that most movies, and certainly action-adventure films, have happy endings. Alongside such market-driven constraints other reasons might be mustered, perhaps in line with a NBF aesthetic, like the psychological function of happy endings for transitional phenomena. The endings resemble mythic or dream resolutions, taking contradictory elements of the dramatic narrative and tying them together in a way that is somehow emotionally satisfying, even if the underlying thematic or ideological conflicts remain relatively untouched. The ending of *Total Recall* abuses this privilege, almost as if Verhoeven decided to push the tendency to its limits and beyond. In a curious way, however, the conclusion is absolutely consistent with the rest of the film.

A fourteen-year-old son of a friend of mine informed me that his discussions in school with his friends mostly revolved around the question of whether or not the entire movie was a dream. Plenty of evidence in *Total Recall* supports such a position. The opening shots take place on Mars in Quaid's prescient dream, which we learn is merely one of a series he's been having. The Rekall, Inc. scenes continue the foreshadowing, allowing the

company psychologist later on to almost convince Quaid he's dreaming, or at least having a "schizoid embolism." When Quaid and Melina are strapped to the memory chairs, both that incident and what Quaid does to the chair have associations with dreams. The confrontation with Kuato has a dream-like quality, as does the one when the taxi driver reveals himself to be a mutant. Finally, the closing shot of *Total Recall* has Quaid worry, "But what if it *was* a dream after all?"

The kiss before "The End" is a time-hallowed Hollywood convention, the cultural wish-fulfillment par excellence. But by raising the question about dreaming in the moment before the kiss Verhoeven adds a twist: we are, in effect, being asked to imagine a *different ending*, and in so doing refer to another image than the one on the screen. It is as if two parallel endings were being presented at once, a trite one which we expect and can see; and another that recalls a convention so hackneyed that it can't be used, but which nonetheless has the power to force us to actively consider other images (e.g., waking up from a dream, like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*). Thus the comment threatens to disrupt the reliance on unconscious fantasy as a false solution for real problems central to fetishism. It also ties the ribbon of dream references running throughout the plot around the whole package of the movie, leaving, however, all the unresolved ideological conflicts tucked neatly out of sight inside.

The social problems referred to by the images in the apocalyptic climax—and seen in passing throughout *Total Recall*—cannot in fact be successfully resolved in the story. The climactic sequence can only deal with them by literally blowing them up. There is too much material here, the conventions of the genre too constricting, the issues too complex, for anything resembling closure to occur. Verhoeven must fall back on a dream-like structure of resolution because the ideas clustered around the narrative, recapitulated in the ending, overdetermine their medium in the plot. The special visual effects and editing, the explosions, rushing air and crashing glass on the sound track, followed by political, religious, economic, ecological and sexual calm, impose an artificial unity for thematic elements that cannot otherwise be unified. Quaid's self-conscious question to Melina, seen in this light, constitutes an admission regarding what sort of ending this is, kin perhaps to the wonderful close of *North By Northwest*. *Total Recall*'s ending stands squarely in the decade-long tradition of false NBF endings; indeed, it's the grandest false ending of them all.

In defense of the film-maker, the problems raised by NBF films can only be resolved outside the movie theater anyway; social problems demand social solutions. But what does that leave us with? We might be able to excuse the irresolution of many of the themes in *Total Recall*; after all, it's not a requirement that a movie take care of each problem it deals with. But the treatment of a couple themes do need assessment, since they occupy center stage of the NBF.

One of these is the film's approach to understanding technology. In *Back to the Future III* (not a NBF film, but one with some striking similarities), the film ends with the time machine, now transformed into a late-nineteenth century American locomotive, flying up into the air, wheeling about, and speeding away, steel wheels spinning. Taking an icon of supreme importance to earlier representations of American history (the engine of progress) the film-maker cavalierly manipulates it with computer-assisted special effects, essentially gutting the image of its historical weight even as American heavy industry itself has been ideologically (and increasingly, in reality) banished to the dustbin of history. It is a typical contemporary masscult redrawing of imagery relating to technology in which technology is, in essence, equated with magic. By implication, we ordinary mortals can only stand slackjawed before the wizards of technology (film-makers included), admiring their efforts, far above our heads, to do whatever it is they're doing. The notion of social control over these technologies is specifically not in the picture. Nor, interestingly, is the idea of progress, which formerly always used to be connected like a siamese twin with American notions of technology, but which has been severed from cultural representations of technology by the first appearances in our culture of the material of which the NBF is made.

The locomotive in *Back to the Future III* thus shares something with the more thoughtful approach to technology in *Total Recall*. The Martian technology, freed at the end from capitalist control, turns out to be the savior of the planet's workers. And while that technology is shown to be (literally) contested terrain in the climactic struggle between

As air rushes out of cracks in the dome, Quaid is almost carried along to his death.

Quaid and Cohaagen over the "switch," the result of throwing that switch is also powerful beyond our ken, threatening to do us in, a touch of the promethean tossed, for good measure, onto the already overdetermined narrative. The magical resolution of all the film's dramatic and social conflicts by the throwing of that switch is not so far from the image of the flying locomotive (at least as good as Schwarzenegger's body for what it also represents).

By implication, the climactic sequence of *Total Recall* is fetishistic: it represents the wish to magically deal with a reality too threatening and complex to face directly. The personal problem Quaid confronts—recovering his memory and identity—changes during the course of his adventures. When he realizes that Hauser was on the wrong side of the Martian class struggle, he chooses to remain Quaid instead, because he knows Cohaagen is evil, the colonial workers' struggle is just, and he belongs with the woman he loves. Giving up his former identity is the first step toward understanding Kuato's admonition to act.

Unfortunately, the ultimate meaning of his action remains somewhat murky. Can we be saved from the ravages of technological capitalism by the "moral" use of a technology—perhaps the ultimate technology, atomic power—developed by that capitalism? Is Quaid a social agent, a stand-in for his people reclaiming their place in history and society, or just an individual action-adventure hero? His action, performed in a void where further explanation might otherwise be, begs the question, will we be able to save ourselves from the New Bad Future, into the edge of which we've already slipped?

The NBF subgenre, and its recent entry *Total Recall*, at least in the way I've argued it here, bear some resemblances to that venerable film form, the cliffhanger serial. Too bad we can't afford to wait to see the last episode and find out how everything turned out. In the meantime, we are left to ponder whether NBF films build a helpful bridge to understanding the emerging future in our own day, generously providing us with cultural transitional objects; or if they're regressively filled with cultural fetish objects that mask our descent into a violent, authoritarian technobarbarism. Both tendencies in these films battle for the souls of their audience. But only the folks who may be alive in the year 2084 will be able to look back and offer the definitive answer.

Notes

1. "The New Bad Future: Robocop and 1980s Sci-Fi Films," *Science as Culture 5*, Free Association Books, London, 1989.
2. "Sign of the Times: The Computer as Character in *Tron, War Games* and *Superman III*," *Film Quarterly*, Winter 1984.
3. Greenacre, Phyllis, "The Fetish and the Transitional Object," in *Emotional Growth: Psychoanalytic Studies of the Gifted and a Great Variety of Other Individuals*, Vol. 1, International Universities Press, New York, 1971.
4. Jacoby, Russell, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology from Adler to Laing*, Beacon Press, 1975.
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James Naremore

Authorship and the Cultural Politics of Film Criticism

Film study in the United States owes a considerable and frequently acknowledged debt to the French romance with Hollywood auteurs during the late fifties and early sixties. From the time auteurism entered universities, however, it came under attack from both the right and the left, and it was soon displaced by successive waves of radical theory. Two forms of theoretical intervention exerted especially strong influence on the field. During the seventies, a conjuncture of Sausserian linguistics, Althusserian Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis led to a rigorous investigation of the cinematic "apparatus" and its constructions of subjectivity. During the eighties, film theorists grew increasingly skeptical of authoritarian models of communication, and at the same time curious about popular reception or "resistance"—consequently we heard less about the poststructuralists and more about Gramsci, de Certeau, Bourdieu, and the British exponents of cultural studies. Today, the typical essay about film or television tends to swerve between two poles; on the one hand, it alludes to the ideologically pernicious, "interpellating" effects of Hollywood, and on the other, it argues that meaning is unstable, open to populist readings or "poachings."[1] No matter which side of the argument it emphasizes, this sort of essay is usually concerned more with textuality than with authors or individual workers. Even so, as I shall indicate shortly, writing about directors hasn't disappeared, and discussion of authorship isn't incompatible with theory. In fact, given the current situation, which is also characterized by a renewed interest in history and the sociology of culture, a space has been opened for us to reconsider the contributions of the original auteurists, noticing a certain tendency of their work that's still relevant.

I want to begin that reconsideration here, although I hasten to add that an essay of this size can't attempt a full-scale review. (Fortunately, we already have important studies of the topic by John Hess and Edward Buscombe, together with John Caughie's anthology, *Ideas of Authorship*, and Jim Hillier's annotated collection of writings from *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the fifties and sixties.[2]) Instead of surveying the entire ground, I propose to glance back at the early criticism of Jean-Luc Godard, and then to say two or three things about the present scene. It isn't my intention to provoke a nostalgic revival of high auteurism, nor do I want to reinstall the analysis of directors at the center of film studies. Nevertheless, a brief look at Godard's critical strategies will enable me to challenge at least one hoary assumption about the auteurists. In addition, it will provide me with a starting point for some observations about a much larger issue: the paradoxical "survival of the author" in contemporary film criticism.

I

To illustrate my remarks about Godard, I plan to concentrate mostly on a single representative passage from his early writing—a couple of paragraphs from his amusing review of the 1959 Douglas Sirk film, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, starring John Gavin and Liselotte Pulver. To contextualize the review, I should note that 1959 was the *annus mirabilis* of the New Wave, when Godard himself filmed *Breathless*. During this period Godard was partly a critic and partly a director; he would soon attain considerable success as a filmmaker, but for the time being his critical authority

A Time to Love and a Time to Die

derived from his membership in what Raymond Williams has described as a second-order cultural formation—a "movement," centered in a metropolis and organized around a series of collective manifestations in the pages of a journal.[3] To be still more specific, I should also note that auteurism was constituted by several groups, including a number of left critics who wrote for *Positif* and several right critics who wrote for the "MacMahonist" journal, *Présence du Cinéma*. Even the writers at *Cahiers* were a more heterogeneous collective than they're sometimes made to sound. Godard's compatriots shared an admiration for certain directors and films, but they also had different tastes; several of them were "philosophic" and vaguely neo-Catholic, but their politics ranged everywhere from latent Fascism to western Marxism. Thus if my attempt to characterize auteurism in terms of a single review and a single writer seems questionable, that will only confirm my general argument, which points to the necessity for distinguishing among historical moments and individual agents. In any case, here's what Godard said:

> I am going to write a madly enthusiastic review of Douglas Sirk's latest film, simply because it sets my cheeks afire. . . . In the first place I shall refer . . . to Griffith's *True-Heart Susie*, because I think one should mention Griffith in all articles about the cinema: everyone agrees, but everyone forgets none the less. Griffith, therefore, and André Bazin, too, for the same reasons; and now that is done, I can get back to . . . *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*. But here I pause for a moment to say that, next to *Le Plaisir*, this is the greatest title in all cinema, sound or silent, and also to say that I heartily congratulate Universal-International on having changed the title of Erich Maria Remarque's novel, which was called *A Time to Live and a Time to Die*. . . . in other words, by replacing the word "live" by "love," they implicitly posed the director the question—an admirable starting-point for the script—"Should one live to love, or love to live?" And now, having finished my detour and comparisons: a time to love and a time to die—no, I shall never tire of writing these new, still imperturbably new, words. *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*: you know very well that I am going to talk about this film as I do about friend Fritz or Nicholas Ray, about *You Only Live Once* or *They Live by Night*, as though, in other words, John Gavin and Liselotte Pulver were Aucassin and Nicolette in 1959.
>
> This, anyhow, is what enchants me about Sirk: this delirious mixture of medieval and modern, sentimentality and subtlety, tame compositions and frenzied Cinemascope. Obviously one must talk about all this as Aragon talks about Elsa's eyes, raving a little, a lot, passionately, no matter, the only logic which concerns Sirk is delirium.[4]

This passage is a far cry from any academic criticism that has ever been written, and I think it belies the glib assertions we usually make about auteurism. For example, the most commonplace thing we can say about the early *Cahiers* critics is that

they were romantics. I need hardly provide evidence of such a claim, but let me cite one recent instance, from the introduction to Thomas Schatz's valuable and well-received study of Hollywood, *The Genius of the System*. "Auteurism" Schatz writes, "would not be worth bothering with if it hadn't been so influential, effectively stalling film history in a prolonged stage of adolescent romanticism."[5] Most contemporary writers would probably agree. If we're going to call Godard a romantic, however, we should at least recognize that he's a belated and ironic variant of the type. Looked at closely, his review reads more like a calculated mime of the "delirium" he finds in Sirk's film; it's a parody or a pastiche of familiar romantic gestures —what Godard himself calls a "madly enthusiastic" account of "Aucassin and Nicolette in 1959."

Of course we can never tell exactly when a parody is a parody. When James Joyce opens the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses* by writing "The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace," is he mocking the conventions of popular women's romance, or is he acknowledging the seductive power of a certain kind of language? Is he engaging in a ventriloquist's act, concealing some Joycean essence, or does he take pleasure in "bad writing," allowing his novel to become the thing it mimics? Godard's review has exactly this sort of modernist ambiguity; in fact, Godard was familiar with Joyce's work, and if I were to quote his review at length in the original French, we would discover that it contains not only pastiche but also a great many Joycean puns. (At one point, for example, Godard derides "*tous ces René qui n'ont pas les idées claires.*")

Godard therefore resembles the modernists as much as he resembles the romantics. But he also has something in common with what Peter Bürger calls the "historical avant-garde." To make this point clear, I need to digress for a moment (almost like Godard), observing that a number of cultural historians—including Bürger, Martin Jay, and Andreas Huyssen—use the terms "modernist" and "avant-garde" to describe distinct artistic practices.[6] The distinction isn't easy to maintain, because insofar as the two forms actually exist, they employ similar strategies; moreover, because they both have left-wing and right-wing proponents, they can't be separated along the usual political lines. Nevertheless, important shades of difference between them can be indicated. European modernism originated in the romanticized, art-for-art's sake movements of the late nineteenth century, and like aestheticism, it usually cultivated what Theodor Adorno (a modernist himself) described as an "autonomous" social role.[7] In all its manifestations, modernism was contradictory and paradoxical: it was aggressively individualistic and yet nostalgic for pre-industrial *Kultur*; it developed out of bourgeois society, but it was sharply critical, even deconstructive, of bourgeois values; it was potentially scandalous, but it quickly achieved canonical status in universities. By contrast, the historical avant-garde was a utopian political movement of the twenties and thirties that used modern technology as a weapon against bourgeois institutions. Generally speaking, whereas modernism tended to be critical of the industrial age, the avant-garde welcomed machine-made culture and celebrated its liberating potential; it shared modernism's fondness for montage, but above all it loved "automatic" writing and various kinds of *détournement*—anything that would promote what Roland Barthes later called the provisional "text" over the commodified "work." Hence the well-known debates between Adorno and Walter Benjamin, representing the modernist and avant-garde wings of left German culture in the twenties.[8]

Considered in this fashion, Godard could be described as something of a romantic, something of a modernist, and also something of an avant-gardist. Notice, for instance, his delighted response to the latest technology. Like all the auteurists, he's in love with Cinemascope; at a later point in his review he disputes what he calls the "fashionable" idea that "the wide screen is all window dressing," and he remarks that Sirk's camera movements "give the impression of having been done by hand instead of with a crane, rather as if the mercurial brushwork of a Fragonard were the work of a complex machine." Throughout, he employs a familiar avant-garde strategy: he appropriates a high-culture discourse and turns it on its head; he half-comically apes the conventions of "serious" criticism ("I think one should mention Griffith in all articles about the cinema . . . and André Bazin, too"), in order to defend mechanical reproduction and challenge complacent assumptions about both authorship and mass art.

By the time he wrote his review, Godard had al-

ready become interested in Brecht; but the particular avant-garde movement with which he has strongest affinities is surrealism. We should remember that although the French surrealist journal *Positif* repeatedly attacked *Cahiers* during the fifties, the two groups were in many ways similar. Both were fond of American films, particularly of the B movie and the *film noir*; and both sometimes used a lyrical, almost swooning language—as when Godard tells us that *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* sets his cheeks afire. It's no accident that at one point in his review Godard alludes to the surrealist writer Louis Aragon, and it's almost predictable that he should proclaim *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (next to *Le Plaisir*) as the "greatest title in all of cinema." Despite the auteurists' frequent praise of "good storytellers," and despite their tendency to derive moral universals from the plots of Hollywood movies, their charm lay in the fact that they were always dreamers of mass culture, looking for what André Breton had called "moments of priceless giddiness."[9] They had, in fact, a quasi-surrealistic, rather than a purely romantic, conception of authorship. In Godard's review, for example, we're told that the power of *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* rises out of Universal-International's mercenary decision to change the title of Erich Maria Remarque's novel. By this means, Godard suggests, the studio inadvertently unleashed a ghost in the machine, giving the director (and the viewer?) an opportunity to set beauty and delirium in motion.

But Godard has still another reason to admire the title of the film. What the auteurists shared most of all with the surrealists (and here it's important to note that both groups were male) was a predilection for *l'amour fou*. The auteurists adored such movies as *Vertigo, You Only Live Once, Rebel Without a Cause, They Live by Night, Gun Crazy*, and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*—all of which were concerned with compulsive lovers who flouted bourgeois morality and consumed themselves with passion. As film-makers, they enshrined this theme in their own work: for example in Godard's *Breathless* and *Pierrot le fou* (a picture about "the last romantic couple," which was based on a novel entitled *Obsession*), and in Truffaut's *Two English Girls, The Story of Adele H*, and *The Woman Next Door*. Ultimately, *l'amour fou* became a way of describing their own relationship to the screen; they were both lovers and satirists of the cinema's obscure objects, and they often seemed aware of the essential absurdity of their project.

A Time to Love and a Time to Die

I don't mean to overstate the connection between the auteurists and the surrealists, although it's a connection that has been noticed elsewhere.[10] My point is simply that Godard's writing is made up of a mixture of familiar discourses, and that it can't be identified completely with any of them. It blends the voice of high culture with movie reviewing, and it blurs the boundaries between romantic aestheticism, modernism, and the historical avant garde. It reminds us of things we've heard before, but it also sounds different and new. In the last analysis, Godard in 1959 resembles nothing so much as what we would nowadays call a "postmodern" critic.

The term "postmodern" needs to be used guardedly, because it suggests a quite un-Godard-like disavowal of a philosophical "center" or metanarrative. Even so, it helps me to indicate an important fact about the auteurists' place in film history. The classic cinema's technology and modes of production had grown out of the second industrial revolution—the period when oil replaced steam and coal as a primary fuel, when "Fordism" became the chief means of industrial organization, and when mechanical inventions proliferated at a dizzy rate. (Significantly, one of the Lumières' very first movies showed a train arriving at a station, as if the most important machine of the new era were paying tribute to its predecessors.) Auteurism, by contrast, emerged in the declining years of the studio system, at the dawn of the television age. This

is not to say that the auteurists and their earliest followers in Britain and America literally watched films on TV; on the contrary, their cult enthusiasms were nourished by select revival theaters and museums. They belonged, however, to a generation of people everywhere who would begin to use TV like a *cinémathèque*, viewing films in no historical order, regarding the classic cinema as something distant or dying. Over the next decade, widespread academic study of film was prompted partly by auteurism and partly by the easy accessibility of old movies on TV—a phenomenon that enabled everyone to participate in an investigation of Hollywood's past. As a result, whereas the movies were an invention of modernity, *all* film culture and *all* writing on film since the late fifties has had something of a postmodern character. One irony of this situation is that while academics today often call themselves students of cinema, most of them have long been practitioners of a kind of teletheory, living in a world of recycled images. For that reason alone, they have more in common with the auteurists than they usually realize.

There are also stylistic or methodological reasons for describing the early Godard as a postmodernist. What I have in mind is the account of postmodernism offered by Andreas Huyssen in his influential book, *After the Great Divide*. The tenth chapter of that book, entitled "Mapping the Postmodern," argues that sometime around 1960—coincident with the historical situation outlined above—a new aesthetic began to appear in Western society. Huyssen argues that the new sensibility was signalled especially by the Pop movement in American art, by the literary criticism of Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler, and by the later architectural writings of Robert Venturi. What all these events have in common, in Huyssen's words, is a "break with the austere canon of high modern[ism]" and an "espousal of the commercial vernacular of consumer culture."[11] They involve a sometimes baffling mixture of elitism and populism, and they adopt a critical strategy that's currently being rediscovered in some quarters of academe. As Huyssen puts it, "Pop in the broadest sense was the context in which a notion of the postmodern first took shape, and from the beginning until today, the most significant trends within postmodernism have challenged modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture."[12]

Huyssen doesn't mention Godard or Truffaut, but it seems to me that auteurism and the New Wave belong on his list of postmodern artifacts. Godard's early work is roughly contemporary with Pop, and it clearly draws inspiration from the American commercial scene. To be sure, there was nothing special about a French intellectual who praised American movies—a phenomenon that dates back at least as far as the surrealists. There was also a quality of old-fashioned enthusiasm about Godard and the auteurists, who were never so coolly uncritical as Andy Warhol, and never so condescending to movies as Leslie Fiedler or Susan Sontag. Nevertheless, as a writer Godard used the language of high art to praise certain "pulpy" Hollywood auteurs, and as a film-maker he borrowed imagery from such films as *Some Came Running*, which director Vincente Minnelli had designed to resemble what he described as "the inside of a juke box."[13] Several passages of Godard's criticism could almost be used to define the Pop sensibility—for instance, his description of a couple of his favorite scenes from Samuel Fuller's *Forty Guns* (1957):

> Barbara Stanwyck's brother grabs her to use her as a shield. "Go on, shoot, you dirty coward," he shouts to Barry Sullivan, who is covering them with his gun. And without hesitation Barry Sullivan calmly shoots Barbara Stanwyck, who crumples up, and then the brother, who falls mortally wounded in his turn. "Stop shooting, you dirty coward," cries the dying man—Bang! Bang!—"For pity's sake, stop shooting"—Bang! Bang!—"Stop shooting, can't you see I'm dying"—Bang! Bang! Bang!
>
> In another scene, Gene Barry is courting ravishing young Eve Brent, making her charming debut before the cameras in an eye-shade borrowed from Samuel. Eve sells guns. Jokingly, Gene aims at her. The camera takes his place and we see Eve through the barrel of the gun. Track forward until she is framed in close-up by the mouth of the barrel. Next shot: they are in a kiss.[14]

In this period, Godard was mounting an attack not only on the bourgeois "tradition of quality," but also on certain features of both modernism and the avant-garde. Citing Huyssen again, we could say

that "modernism's running feud with mass society [and] the avant-garde's attack on high art as a support system of cultural hegemony always took place on the pedestal of high art itself." The practice of Godard and many of the other auteurists was different. Despite their male bias and despite their roots in a specific fraction of postwar French society, they were opening the possibility for a new kind of intellectual activity in which many people could engage—what Huyssen calls an "experimental mixing and meshing" of the old cultural domains.[15]

If we view Godard within the context of an emergent, still "critical" postmodernism, we can recapture some of the radical quality of his early work. This is not to say, however, that any label is completely adequate to his criticism. Notice, for example, that in order to demonstrate some of his most interesting attributes, I've had to slightly repress or elide the obvious fact that his writing helped to construct figures like Douglas Sirk and Samuel Fuller as auteurs. Clearly, Godard was also in some sense "romantic," poised between two phases of history. But "romanticism" in this context need not be a defect. By way of explaining why, let me now offer a brief and partial defense of the general policy of writing about individual artists—a policy that needs to be seen against the background of later developments in film theory.

II

We know that Godard soon turned against his early allegiances and joined another cultural formation—the Dziga Vertov group. During the intervening years, auteurism migrated to other countries and other discursive contexts, reforming into separate but related configurations. In Britain, for example, auteurism was inflected by a tradition of intellectual debate that had begun with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and reached its apotheosis in critics like Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis. Thus in contrast to Godard's playfulness, the best of the British auteurists adopted tones of high seriousness. The introductory chapter of Robin Wood's famous book on Hitchcock, entitled "Why We Should Take Hitchcock Seriously," consisted of an elaborate comparison between Shakespeare and the Hollywood auteurs, placing great stress on the "complex moral implications" of American films.[16] Along similar lines, the first edition of Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* concluded with a suggestion that film study might join forces with an Arnoldian form of education. Although Wollen had a more complex idea of authorship than most of his contemporaries, he argued that universities ought to produce more books about major Hollywood directors: "It seems plain to me that Hitchcock is at least as important an artist as, say, Scott Fitzgerald, much more important than many other modern American novelists who have found their way on to the university curriculum. I do no think time is wasted in writing about these novelists, all things being equal, and I do not think it would be wasted if hundreds of post-graduates were writing research theses on Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls or John Ford."[17]

Other early auteurist enthusiasms: *They Live by Night* and *You Only Live Once*

For a while, Wollen's advice was heeded—even though, like Godard, he explicitly rejected his initial position, withdrawing the above remarks from subsequent editions of his book. The study of Hollywood directors quickly became a legitimate form of intellectual activity and a minor industry in universities; at the same time, however, film culture was being changed by the events of 1968, and by the antihumanist theory that soon entered the academy. In Paris, the revolutionary spirit of the late sixties led to a variety of attempts at restructuring the film industry. Film-makers organized collectives, and there was widespread dissatisfaction with any system that designated individuals as "bosses of meaning." The ferment of those days is thoroughly and intelligently discussed in a well-known monograph by Sylvia Harvey, which describes the modes of production and education proposed by the French, revealing both their considerable importance and their troubling contradictions.[18] Everywhere, it seemed, the cinema's cult of personality was being assailed, and this invigorating turn of events had a lasting effect in theoretical circles.

To sense the agenda that was taking shape in both France and Britain, we need only refer to three of the best-known essays from *Screen* in the mid-seventies: Colin MacCabe's "Realism and Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and Stephen Heath's "Narrative Space."[19] All three were deeply indebted to "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," the 1968 *Cahiers du Cinéma* editorial by Pierre Narboni and Jean-Louis Comolli; all three were suspicious of narrative and popular pleasure; all three subsumed individual practices under generalized formal categories, which in turn were assigned ideological effects; all three described the way a hypostasized "subject" was positioned in the filmic text; and all three deconstructed classic realism, implicitly arguing for a modernist or avant-garde cinema that would fragment identity and identification, decentering the character, the reader, and the author.

Screen in the seventies had filiations not only with the post-'68 *Cahiers* critics, but also with the *Tel Quel* group and with the earlier French *nouveau roman*. Ironically, however, *Screen*'s central problematic, like that of most poststructuralist theory, had always already been inscribed within the modernist and avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As early as 1919, in T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," we can detect a similar, albeit right-wing, attack on the popular habit of reading for the personality of the author. Eliot complains of the "confused cries of newspaper critics and the *susurrus* of popular repetition," in which one hears "the names of poets in great numbers." Poetry is made, he argues, not of individual expression but of "structural emotion."[20] It isn't surprising, therefore, that the internal dialectic of *Screen* theory should have led to what David Rodowick has recently called a "crisis of political modernism."[21] Moreover, even though the generation of '68 produced some of the most valuable and brilliantly iconoclastic writing in the history of film, they never really dispensed with authorship. They may have tried, in Foucault's famous phrase, to "imagine a world in which it does not matter who is speaking," but clearly they didn't live in such a world. For every "great man" they tried to kill off in the realm of naive consumption, they created another in the realm of theory, producing a kind of academic star system. Meanwhile, figures like Hitchcock and Sirk continued to serve important functions for *Screen*, just as Balzac and Flaubert served important functions for Roland Barthes.

Today, the situation is different. Auteurism is surely dead, but so are the debates over the death of the author. In the current climate, few people would doubt the value of asking: Who is writing? or Who is speaking? Continued skepticism about such questions not only forestalls important forms of historical inquiry; it also fails to engage with what Huyssen describes as "the *ideology of the subject* (as male, white, middle-class)," and it forsakes the chance of "developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity."[22] Partly for these reasons, the emphasis in critical writing on film and TV has begun to shift from avant-garde practice to ideas of "low culture" and popularity. At the same time, we've continued to be interested in the way historical subjects act as producers and reproducers of culture. Writers on film in the seventies may have thoroughly deconstructed auteurism, and poststructuralist theory may have shown us that authors, works, and canons are simply reifications; nevertheless, some of the most interesting recent books in film studies have been devoted to directors: Tag Gallagher on Ford, Tania Modleski on

Hitchcock, David Bordwell on Ozu, Peter Brunette on Rossellini, and so forth. As I write, Kaja Silverman is editing a series of monographs on women film-makers, and Raymond Carney is editing another series on canonical directors. In France, certain *maîtres de pensée* act as if doubts about authorship had never been voiced: consider Gilles Deleuze's recently translated *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnessota Press, 1989), which offers an unproblematic, highly phenomenological discussion of the "worlds" of classical directors, paying hardly any attention to the circumstances under which films were produced, or to the discursive conditions of author-criticism. Even an American historian like Thomas Schatz, who blithely dismisses the auteurists, doesn't dispense with the idea of the author; with one hand he waves aside the classical Hollywood directors, and with the other he beckons to the studio production chiefs, who he claims were the guiding sensibilities of the movies.

How is it possible that so many sophisticated critics, exploring quite different problems, can continue to be interested in individual artists? The answer is that the decision to write about specific directors, producers, writers, or actors doesn't *in itself* involve a commitment to a theory, a method, a formal taxonomy, or even a politics. Critical discourse on individual personalities can easily serve the interests of the culture industry, but it can also serve quite different ends. It's well to remember that auteurism itself was never really a theory; it took on different political meanings at different conjunctures, and its original French practitioners were a diverse group.

It might be interesting to explore how the name-of-the-author (both as object of study and as critic) functions in the various texts I've mentioned. Suffice it to say that the discourse on authorship, of which auteurism *per se* is only a small part, is full of contradictions. In certain contexts it serves as a force for change, but in others it serves the economic interests of book publishers. Marginalized social groups can declare solidarity and create a collective identity by adopting authors as culture heroes—names that signify complex, coded meanings; indeed I would argue that international auteurism in its early phases had roughly that use. Once these same culture heroes have been established and widely recognized, however, they can become icons

Minnelli's *Some Came Running*

of mass memory or touchstones in a "great tradition." Thus auteurism always had two faces. It mounted an invigorating attack on convention, but it also formed canons and fixed the names of people we should study.

In my own view, these tensions are inescapable, if only because writing about individual careers is necessary to any proper sociology of culture. Such writing helps us to understand the complicated, dynamic relation between institutions and artists, and it makes us aware of performance, theatricality, and celebrity—issues we've just begun to analyze. I would also contend that while Jean-Luc Godard's early criticism is polemical and open to many obvious objections, it still has things to teach us. We can dismiss him as "adolescent," but before we rush to proclaim ourselves adults and scholars, we should remember that adolescence is an important period of human development—a period of cultural resistance, when discoveries are made. If Godard is adolescent, he at least shows us that popular culture can be talked about in a less repressed fashion than high art, and that critical enthusiasms can be channeled into a rebellious, witty energy. His review of Sirk flies in the face of received wisdom, acknowledging the power of Hollywood without being adulatory; it's ironic, but it doesn't use irony to defend against pleasure; it's subjective, but it implicitly claims that the personal is the political.

Interestingly, Godard's review says relatively little about Douglas Sirk's view of the world. It simply testifies to the remarkable images in *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, bestowing a kind of

meaning on them. I'm reminded of a passage in Oscar Wilde's mock-Socratic dialogue, *The Critic as Artist* (1891), where the wise aesthete Gilbert tells his friend Ernest that critical impressionism is the highest form of art appreciation. Gilbert confesses that the Mona Lisa never makes him contemplate Leonardo's vision; on the contrary, he can never look at the painting without hearing the voice of Walter Pater. In similar fashion, I can never see *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* without thinking about Godard's review. I admired the film long before I read his commentary (I saw it first as an adolescent, from the balcony of the Paramount Theater in Lake Charles, Louisiana); and yet Godard's writing has become part of my experience. Like the best critics, the young Godard was not only what Wilde would call an artist but also what Walter Benjamin would call a producer. He appropriated a film to his own ends, showing how it could be used in defense of an attitude. Most of us, whether we are auteurists or not, can hardly expect to do more.

Notes

1. For an intelligent critique of this phenomenon, see the last chapter of Patrick Brantlinger's *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (New York: Routledge, 1990). My essay derives from a series of courses on contemporary theory that Pat Brantlinger and I taught at Indiana University in 1989-90. My thanks to Barbara Klinger, Matei Calinescu, and Claudia Gorbman, who read early drafts of the essay. Thanks also to Peter Brunette, who suggested that I write something about authorship.
2. John Hess, "*La Politique des auteurs*: Part One: World View as Aesthetic," *Jump Cut*, no. 1, May-June 1974; "Part Two: Truffaut's Manifesto," *Jump Cut*, no. 2, July-August 1974. Edward Buscombe, "Ideas of Authorship," *Screen*, vol. 14, no. 3, Autumn, 1973 (reprinted in Caughie). John Caughie, ed., *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Jim Hillier, ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
3. Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981) 55-86. Williams notes that "Formations of the more modern kinds may be seen to occur, typically, at points of transition and intersection within a complex social history, but the individuals who at once compose the formations and are composed by them have a further complex range of diverse positions, interests and influences, some of which are resolved (if at times only temporarily) by the formations, others of which remain as internal differences, and often as the grounds for subsequent divergences, breakaways and further attempted formations" (85-86).
4. The English translation of Godard's review is quoted from Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, eds., *Godard on Godard*, trans. Tom Milne (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 135-36. The original review appears in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 94, April 1959.
5. *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 5.
6. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Martin Jay, *Fin-de-siecle Socialism* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). The distinction between modernism and the avant-garde is explored further, in relation to such terms as "high art," "folk art," "popular art," and "mass art," in the introduction to *Modernity and Mass Culture*, ed. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming, 1991).
7. See, for example, Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1987).
8. Compare, for example, Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), and Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. This is not to say that modernists were simply fearful of machines, like the earlier Luddites. On the contrary, they were in many ways in perfect harmony with the logic of industrial modernity. For an interesting discussion of the relation between technology and the aesthetics of literary modernism, see Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (New York: Oxford, 1988). See also James Knapp, *Literary Modernism: The Transformation of Work* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
9. Breton is quoted in the introduction to a useful book, *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond (London: British Film Institute, 1978), 20.
10. For an excellent discussion of the surrealist or avant-garde roots of early auteurism, see chapter two ("Cults, Fetishes, and Freaks: Sex and Salvation at the Movies") in J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).
11. Huyssen, 187.
12. Huyssen, 188. In this regard, Raymond Durgnat's discussion of auteurism in an early book, *Films and Feelings* (Cambridge: MIT, 1971), seems especially perceptive about cultural change. Durgnat notes that the previous generation of British critics "were heirs to an upper-middle-class climate of cultural habit and opinion exemplified, at its best, by the novels of E. M. Forster.' By contrast, the new generation of auteurists "have grown up with the mass media—films, comics, records, and so on. They are used to picking their way through them, and for them the 'superficial' film is in no way a 'specious' substitute for an 'authentic' work of art; it is a 'fun' film . . . There are films to which one returns again and again, but no Manichean polarity as between the 'elect' and the 'philistine' " (71-73).
13. Vincente Minnelli and Hector Acre, *I Remember It Well* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 325.
14. Godard, trans. Milne, 62.

George Bluestone

Jiří Menzel and the Second Prague Spring

Menzel's *Larks on a String*

He is wearing a white sweat shirt with VIDEOWORKS—CLASS OF '90 in red letters pressed on the front. A light green parka. A workman's leather cap. He tells me his crew gave him the sweat shirt after they finished shooting *Audience*, his collaboration with PBS and Actors Studio, based on a play by Václav Havel. He talks about the rough edit being done in New York even as we speak, and of his plans to do a final edit of the Czech version when he returns to Prague in April. The television play, his first English-language production, is scheduled for broadcast on PBS. Jiří Menzel has come down to the London Hilton coffee shop from his flat in Hyde Park Square where he has been living while teaching at the National Film School in Beaconsfield.

I first heard from Jan Brychta, the eminent Czech emigré painter, illustrator and animator, and an old friend of Menzel's, that David Puttnam had helped Menzel find the teaching job in order to perfect his English. Puttnam is eager to produce a film with Menzel, and he has in fact already commissioned a screenplay by Aida Bortnik, the Argentinian writer who is best known for her script of *The Official Story*. Later, Puttnam tells me, "Menzel is one of a half dozen world-class directors I am eager to work with. I admire the whimsical complication of his characters. A Menzel character is

15. Huyssen, 198.
16. Quoted from Albert J. LaValley, ed., *Focus on Hitchcock* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 84.
17. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1st ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 160–161.
18. *May 68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978).
19. MacCabe, *Screen* 15, 2 (1974). Mulvey *Screen* 16, 3 (1975). Heath, *Screen* 17, 3 (1976).
20. Eliot, *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin-Peregrine, 1963), 25–28.
21. *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988).
22. Huyssen, 213. "Poststructuralism," Huyssen writes, "attacks the appearance of capitalist culture—individualism writ large—but misses its essence." An awareness of this danger is especially evident in contemporary feminist theory, and in studies of Afro-American cinema or literature. Like most forms of collective and alternative politics, writings about women or minorities seem to require ideas of agency and personal experience—ideas that poststructuralism avoided, for fear of capitulating to the "bourgeois humanist subject." As one example of the contemporary theoretical debate within feminism, see Teresa DeLauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). See also Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Smith remarks that "Feminism is . . . an internally heterogeneous discourse, many aspects of which are concerned with questions of identity, subjectivity, and agency" (138).

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like a diamond. Every time you think he or she is 'set,' you turn the diamond in the light and—poof! —there's another facet. He's some kind of quiet magician . . . My interest in Menzel goes back to 1969. I was tremendously excited after seeing *Closely Watched Trains*. The first time we met in Prague, he pointed to the fixtures in my hotel room, indicating they might be bugged. We went for a walk outside to talk. Menzel was on my menu when I was at Columbia Pictures. István Szabó was another. If Jiří and I can begin shooting *Fade Out* in the fall, it will be the culmination of twenty years of effort. . . ."

Menzel examines the cloth napkin on the table. He asks the waitress to bring him a paper napkin. He seems agitated until the waitress brings him his paper napkin. It seems to be a talisman of simplicity; he has refused to order anything more than an espresso. There is about him an aura of monkish charm that comes from years of frugality.

Menzel tells me that he is going to the States where he will be screening his "lost film," *Larks on a String* (*Skřivánci na Niti*, 1969), based on stories by Bohumil Hrabal. Menzel began the film in 1968 during the "Prague Spring," finished it after the Russian invasion and the installation of the hard-line government. The film deals with a situation in 1948–1949 when Party policy put capitalists to work doing manual labor, and workers were elevated to bureaucratic posts. Since the film pokes fun at Party bureaucrats, the new regime put *Larks on a String* on a shelf and refused to release it. Now, twenty years later, with the upheavel in Eastern Europe, and the coming of the Second Prague Spring, Menzel for the first time has permission to exhibit the film, and he will be attending screenings in Los Angeles, Washington, and Cleveland. The film has already won a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. Everyone who has seen it has commented on how lucky we are that the film was not destroyed. *Larks on a String* is another Menzel masterpiece.

How did he like teaching? Menzel says he did one course on scriptwriting, and one on his own very personal favorite films. He has shown, among others, *Stagecoach, Intimate Lighting, Pickpocket, Loves of a Blonde*. He says regretfully, "How do you explain to students why *Intimate Lighting* is a better film than *Blue Velvet*?" He seems much younger than his fifty-two years. Very little gray in his hair. Few wrinkles in his face, as though humor has kept him ageless. There is about him something of the eternal student. He still looks much like the high wire performer he played in *Capricious Summer*. His vaunted shyness and diffidence, his reputation for self-deprecation, have given way to the self-confidence of someone at the height of his powers, to an exhilaration at the fresh winds blowing through his country.

Closely Watched Trains

Suddenly the Czechs seem to be everywhere. Václav Havel is in London getting the red carpet treatment, visiting Margaret Thatcher, the Queen, and giving a talk at the ICA. Havel's "Vaněk" plays are being performed at the Lyric in Hammersmith. Havel's *To Live in Truth* and *Letters to Olga*, published by Penguin and Faber, are in all the bookshops. The BBC exhumes two earlier productions of *Audience* and *Private View*, starring

Michael Crawford. The newsmen pick up Havel's discomfort at formal dress and ceremony. The camera catches him shyly shaking a diplomat's hand, then rubbing his palm on his trousers like a kid. Or the gesture of plumbing his index finger inside his tight shirt collar. He is like a character in a Menzel film. The bohemian, the prisoner, the playwright used to turtlenecks, open collars, corduroys, has trouble standing on ceremony, being confined. Havel seems irresistible to marginalized artists who dream of utterance and power. The press eats it up.

George Konrád, the Hungarian novelist, publishes a major article in *The Guardian*, recounting impressions of Prague. Michael Ignatieff returns from Prague, writes a searching column in *The Observer* asking whether the Velvet Revolution will survive if Havel is not tough enough to prosecute some of the 2,000 secret police who are staying home, out of sight, drawing their salaries. *Newsweek* runs a cover story on Havel asking a similar question: "Václav Havel Is a Genuine Hero. But Is He a Good President?" The Playwright/President is one of the most charismatic and humane leaders on the world stage, but does he have what it takes to guide his country through the difficult transition to democratization and a market economy? This is the language of people who think Havel is too good to be true. Memories of Dubček's fall are etched painfully in collective memory. One of the most poignant images on television shows Julian Glover in Prague screening a docudrama for Alexander Dubček. The program had been produced years ago, with Glover playing Dubček, but it had never been broadcast in Czechoslovakia. As the two men watch, we hear Dubček saying, "Yes, that is just the way it was . . . Yes, it was so . . . " At the end, both men embrace, tears in their eyes, as though they thought this day would never come. The BBC is running a two-week homage to the liberation, leading up to the June election, called "Tales from Prague." The first program in the series is called "Absurdistan." Philip Roth publishes a major article, "A Conversation in Prague," in *The New York Review of Books*, based on his first visit in fourteen years, centering on the work of his old samizdat friend, Ivan Klíma, whose latest novel, *Love and Garbage*, is prominently displayed in London bookstores. The day after I return from Prague, I notice signs in the Underground announcing yet another Havel play, *Temptation*, directed by James Roose-Evans, at the Westminster Theatre. There is an influence here, a steely hope laced with ineradicable caution (so many bitter disappointments over the years), far beyond the size and numbers of the country. And Menzel's work and situation are at the heart of it.

In the West we had the impression that when Menzel chose to remain in Prague after the Russian invasion he was without work for nearly twenty years, that there was a huge gap between *Closely Watched Trains* (*Ostře Sledované Vlaky*, 1966) and *Capricious Summer* (*Rozmarné Léto*, 1967), and *My Sweet Little Village* (*Vesničko Má Střediskova*, 1985). The truth is a little different. In fact, Menzel was without a film for only five of those years, and even then he worked steadily as actor and director at his theater, the Činoherní Klub. He kept his association with Barrandov Studios where, besides *Larks on a String*, he completed seven films which have yet to be distributed in the West. If *Larks on a String* is representative, we are in for a treat, for a major resurrection of an extraordinary body of work: *Crime in the Night-Club* (*Zločin v Šantánu*, 1968), from a novel by Josef Škvorecký. *Who Looks for Gold* (*Kdo Hledá Zlaté*, 1974). *Seclusion Near the Forest* (*Na Samotě u Lesa*, 1975). *Those Wonderful Men with Their Cranks*, also known as *Magicians of the Silver Screen* (*Báječni Muži s Klikou*, 1978). *Cutting It Short* (*Postřižiny*, 1980), from a story by Bohumil Hrabal. *Snow Drop Festival* (*Slavnosti Sněženek*, 1982), from a story by Hrabal. *The End of Old Times* (*Konec Starých Časů*, 1988) from a novel by Vladislav Vančura. *The End of Old Times* has been shown at the Montreal Film Festival where Menzel won Best Director.

Menzel makes a rueful connection between two of his film titles and their political context. "In 1967 I finished *Capricious Summer*, and in 1988 we had our capricious summer . . . In 1988 I finished *The End of Old Times*, and in 1989 we indeed saw the end of old times." "Then you must be a prophet." He smiles dryly, with some pleasure, and does not dispute the description.

In Philip Roth's searching piece (*New York Review of Books*, April 12 1990) centering on his extended interview with Ivan Klíma, the description of the felt difference in Czech attitudes toward Václav Havel and Milan Kundera is similar to the difference in feeling toward Jiří Menzel and Miloš

Forman. Klíma responds to Roth's question about the obsession with Kundera:

> Kundera's picture, his critics will tell you, is the sort of picture which you would see from a very capable foreign newspaperman who'd spent a few days in the country. Such a picture is acceptable to the Western reader because it confirms his expectations; it reinforces the fairy tale about good and evil, which a good boy likes to hear again and again. But for these Czech readers our reality is no fairy tale. They expect a much more comprehensive and complex picture, a deeper insight into our lives from a writer of Kundera's stature . . .

The natural pride in one of their own "making it" in the West is tempered by the sense among many Prague artists and intellectuals that Forman and Kundera "ran out" on their country, left their roots behind and lost some essential indigenous Czech spirit. Forman returned to Czechoslovakia to shoot *Amadeus* (before the revolution) in a partial gesture of rediscovery and restoration, but what came out was a gaudy pageant that was straight Hollywood. All one has to do is compare the shooting of *Loves of a Blonde* and *Firemen's Ball* to *Amadeus* to immediately sense the difference. I ask Menzel if there is truth to the rumor that he did not leave Prague in 1968 because he was attached to his aging and ailing father. It was the only time in our talks I could feel him bristling: "I had my father. I had my mother. I had my country." Clearly he was feeling that he had been one of "those who stayed the course."

Jan Brychta says, "I don't think there's much of that kind of negative feeling between Forman and Menzel. They have never been close friends, and in any event each respects what the other has done. I think they felt they were fighting the same battle on two different fronts."

Jan Brychta had told me the joke that was going around expatriate circles: "How does a smart Czech Jew talk to a dumb Czech Jew?" Answer: "By phone from London to Prague." After the laughter subsides, it occurs to me: "Wait a minute. Does this make Menzel a dumb Czech?" The diamond turns and suddenly there's another facet. It appeals to Menzel's sense of irony and sympathetic sadness that he is planning his first English film abroad at the precise moment there is no longer any need to. In one of his earlier interviews Menzel said, "I am Czech to the bone." That was given as a reason for not leaving with Ján Kadár, Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Frank Daniel, Antonín and Mira Liehm. His decision to stay has about it the aura of Brechtian cunning. He learned to maneuver his way through the bureaucracy. When the Party zigged, he knew how to zag.

"I think the authorities were very reluctant to mess with Czechoslovakia's first Oscar winner," Jan Brychta explains. David Puttnam concurs, "I think Jiří's international reputation protected him." The story is told that when the Russian tanks rolled into Prague, most writers and artists were extremely apprehensive about how and when the apparatchiks would crack down. Menzel remembers one screening of *Crime in the Nightclub* shortly after the Russians came in. The film ends with the main characters, who must be sacrificed by the authorities because they have been too successful, having their heads in nooses and singing (echoes of *Beggar's Opera*). Menzel thought this ending was a perfect metaphor for Czechoslovakia: "still singing with a noose around its neck—and the end just a little in doubt." The Russians in the audience let the political satire roll right by them. Instead, characteristically, they objected to the accompanying newsreel and documentary. Menzel found the bureaucracy porous.

Although he did not make a film for five years, from 1969 to 1974, he worked steadily in the theater, at Činoherni Klub and the Semafor, mounting productions of Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, collaborating with Jiří Suchy and Jiří Slitr on *The Last Hospital* and *The Devil from Vinohrady*. The slogan above the portal at FAMU, the Prague Film School—"We Must Err on the Side of Freedom"—never came down. Menzel continued to act, most notably in Věra Chytilová's *The Apple Game*. It may have been his gentle humor, or the fact that his films are more interested in Chekhovian epiphanies than in broad political gestures, or his frugal style of shooting, or his persona as a shy and diffident clown. But the fact remains that he was able to get his projects accepted by the managers at Barrandov Studios. Havel stayed and went to jail. Klíma stayed and had his driver's license lifted. Menzel stayed and poked breathing holes in the system. They all went on singing with the noose

around their necks, and the outcome just a little in doubt.

Later, in Prague, we meet again. This time I pick him up at the Činoherní Klub. I see that his old collaborator, Jiří Suchy, is still producing satirical reviews at the Semafor. At the new national theatre on Nárdoní Street an early Havel play, *The Garden Fete*, is in repertory. There is a curious air in the city of expectation and caution, of euphoria and skepticism. The first free Czech election in more than forty years is coming up in early June. There are twenty-three parties on the ballot; there is some fear that if the vote is fragmented, Havel may have trouble forming a strong Civic Forum government. (On June 9, Civic Forum in fact won a comfortable majority and was able to form a government.) There are frequent political marches and rallies. At a memorial plaque reading simply, "17 November 1989," candles still burn. New party newspapers proliferate. At the St. Wenceslas statue there is a hunger strike in protest against the Czech Communist Party. At the Jan Hus monument there is another hunger strike in support of democratization in mainland China. On Na Příkopé the kiosks are alive with exhibits of Prague's past, with chilling photographs and news stories recounting the tragedies of Nazi and Russian occupations. In store windows there are TV monitors running documentaries on the historic occupations and liberations. The lines are almost as long as those for books and ice-cream. Crowds gather at the windows bearing silent witness to images that had been forbidden as recently as November 1989.

Menzel has been meeting in darkened rooms all morning, and he is eager to walk. We go to a café off Wenceslas Square and order abstemious orangeades. I have still not seen Menzel eat solid food. He has been working at the theater until eleven o'clock each evening. His schedule is packed, but he seems if anything more exhilarated than he was in London. He is preparing a production of Václav Havel's version of *Three-Penny Opera*, which has never been properly performed in Prague. Menzel has returned from a triumphal tour of the United States where his films have been well received at showings in Los Angeles, Washington, and Cleveland. He has been reading the Aida Bortnik script for his possible collaboration with David Puttnam. He is planning to begin yet another adaptation of a Bohumil Hrabal story. He is about to go off to Film Export to pick up tapes of *Audience*, his adaptation of the Havel play, so that he can start editing the Czech version. And on top of all this, he has accepted Barrandov Studio's invitation to begin producing a series of films by young Czech directors, an attempt to revive the renaissance that blossomed briefly under Dubček. He is very aware that Hrabal is appearing at the Brighton Film Festival along with other East European writers and directors. He had intended to go, but now thinks he must send regrets.

I go to an exhibition of banned books at Strahov Monastery, now the national library, housing beautiful collections of illuminated manuscripts in the elegantly appointed Hall of Theology and Hall of Philosophy. Sixty-Eight Publishers, under the doughty editorship of Josef Škvorecký and his wife Zdena during and since the Russian occupation, working out of their office in Toronto, had published 200 titles by banned Czech writers. The books are now proudly on display, burning brightly in the spotlights. On the cases are photographs of the writers, and complete bibliographies. Ivan Klíma is there, and Milan Kundera, Škvorecký himself with more than a dozen titles. Bohumil Hrabal, Nobel Prize-winning poet Jaroslav Seifert, Antonín Liehm, Vladislav Vančura, in short the best of Czech literature, and all the writers Menzel has adapted during the last twenty-five years. I am reminded of the devastating power of the book burning in *Fahrenheit* 451 (see my "The Fire and the Future," *Film Quarterly*, July, 1967), and am deeply moved by the resurrection of these books, like tender shoots of love and comradeship taking root in the scrapheaps of *Larks on a String*.

Over our orangeades, I ask some questions about *Larks on a String*, which I have seen since our last meeting. Menzel says, "We used bits and pieces of several Hrabal stories, so we knew we would need a frame, some way of focusing the film so it would not become too diffuse. We remembered a story going around Prague. A commissar is addressing a meeting of workers of the subject of the transition from socialism to communism. A worker jumps up and interrupts: 'It is all very well to talk about the transition from socialism to communism, but let's talk facts. Where is the meat? Where is the milk? Where are the eggs?' The commissar answers, 'These things take time. You must

be patient. We must all be patient.' A year later the same commissar is addressing the same group of workers, and again someone in the audience jumps up to interrupt. 'It is all very well to be theoretical, but there is something we want to know. Where is the meat? Where is the milk? Where are the eggs? And where is the worker who asked the same question last time we met?' When we had the joke, we knew we had the focus."

I saw *Larks on a String* at a press screening at the Cannon Cinema, in London. In the leisurely prologue, we meet six characters who have been assigned to a gigantic scrap metal yard to correct their bourgeois tendencies. The time is shortly after the communist regime was installed under Klement Gottwald in 1948–49. We see the Dairyman, the Professor, the Inventor, the Judge, the Saxophonist and the Cook, played by Václav Neckář, the young pop star and actor Menzel used for Milos Hrma, the assistant station master in *Closely Watched Trains*. The grounds for their assignments, it is gradually revealed, are as comically absurd as they are arbitrary and cruel. The saxophone has been declared a bourgeois instrument. The authorities have cut back from five functioning dairies to three, so the redundant Dairyman has been assigned to the scrap metal detail. The Professor has uttered a forbidden thought. The Cook is a Baptist who refuses to work on Sundays, etc. The men are surrounded with hortatory banners and slogans like, "We are not afraid of work to surpass our norms." The men are told that the scrap metal, like huge forsaken dung heaps which they are ordered to collect and transfer to trundles and box cars, is being shipped to factories to be melted down and converted into tractors and other machine tools to build a glorious future of socialist prosperity. But since we never see the outcome of their labor, the endless gathering of scraps comes to resemble the pointless human labor in the myth of Sisyphus or the carrying of rocks in Martin Sherman's *Bent*.

In an adjoining yard is the prison dorm for a group of women who have been incarcerated for trying to escape to the west. The men seem to live in a low-security bungalow, the women in a high-security prison. A callow guard in uniform sits all day on a chair atop the scrap heap—his sole function, apparently, to keep the men and women

apart. The pace of the work, in contrast to hard Siberian labor, is leisurely and inefficient. The men seem to have plenty of time to sit around playing cards and games; the women to giggle, gossip, and cavort. The system is as porous as the policies of Menzel's studio censors. The men talk about Dreiser, Chaplin, Picasso, tell a long teasing story about Zátopek, the famous long-distance runner, apply the myth of Anteus to their own situation. Gradually, these apparently unrelated anecdotes, witty aphorisms, build up a communal network. Deprived of freedom, condemned to absurd work, they will nevertheless value the experience. The scrap hill brigade will find love among the ruins.

After the prologue, the film develops three intertwining subplots: Neckář courts, pursues, and eventually marries one of the young women. The timid guard marries a gypsy girl, but for a long time she playfully postpones a consummation. Woven into the personal stories are the periodic appearances of Party functionaries who come and go,

both commanding and ingratiating themselves with the men in the penal colony. In one scene, a functionary arrives by car wearing a dressy fedora. He goes into the back seat and emerges with a worker's cap which he switches for the fedora. By the time he is haranguing the men, he has removed his tie as well, and stands there comically trying to endear himself to his listeners. The incorrigibles blink in the sun, failing to be impressed.

A delegation of school children arrive, shepherded by an attractive teacher who with her lacquered hair turns out to be the most rigid ideologue in the film. After the children perform a ritual of tying red scarves around the necks of our scrap metal workers, in a managed gesture of solidarity, the teacher points to the cluster of women prisoners and warns her charges to treat them as pariahs. They are dangerous enemies of the revolution who deserve what has happened to them. They are contaminated and must be put away. The women we have come to know—sensual, easy, light-hearted—contravene this judgment.

It is an unpromising purgatory, and yet eros devises a way to take root and grow. Neckář's young cook approaches Jitka Zelenohorská at least five times, offering to buy chocolates and other black-market gifts for the women. Each time he asks, "Isn't there anything I can do for *you*?" Each time she smiles and shakes her head. Finally he asks, "Will you marry me?" This time she nods yes as if she has all the while been waiting for this moment. Neckář does a back somersault to show his joy. From the scrap heap it is possible for love to grow.

Near the end, a higher-ranking official appears, myopic, blinking blandly in the light. Jan Brychta tells me this sinisterly comic figure is loosely based on Dr. Zdenek Nejedlý, a former Minister of Culture. The official wears a beatific smile, spouts party slogans, seems uplifted by the sight of the scrap metal heap destined for proletarian conversion. As the official passes among his flock, Neckář manages to position himself in the receiving line, and when he gets close enough, seizes the opportunity. Instead of a ritual piety, he asks pointedly: what has happened to the Professor, to the Dairyman? Both have mysteriously disappeared. The official has a wonderful moment of filmed epiphany. The beatific expression does not change, but through some magical osmosis we realize the question has registered, the name is recorded, the decision already made to deal with this upstart swiftly. We are not surprised at the scene that follows. We have had two unconsummated marriages. In Menzel's world sexual deprivation becomes a kind of minor comic tragedy. Characters are blocked until the channels are clear. The bride's community of women have ingeniously prepared a bridal chamber in a small shack in the junkyard, and in an improvised fertility rite with flowers and garlands they escort her there to await her betrothed. As Neckář climbs over mounds of junk to meet his love, the same black car we saw whisk away the Professor and the Dairyman pulls up and forces the young groom in. We will not see this marriage consummated. Just when we begin to fear that Neckář's young cook is off to prison, or even worse, death, he reappears in a quasi-military uniform, along with the Dairyman and Professor, as a member of a forced labor brigade assigned to work in a nearby mine. The Professor says that he is content, that he

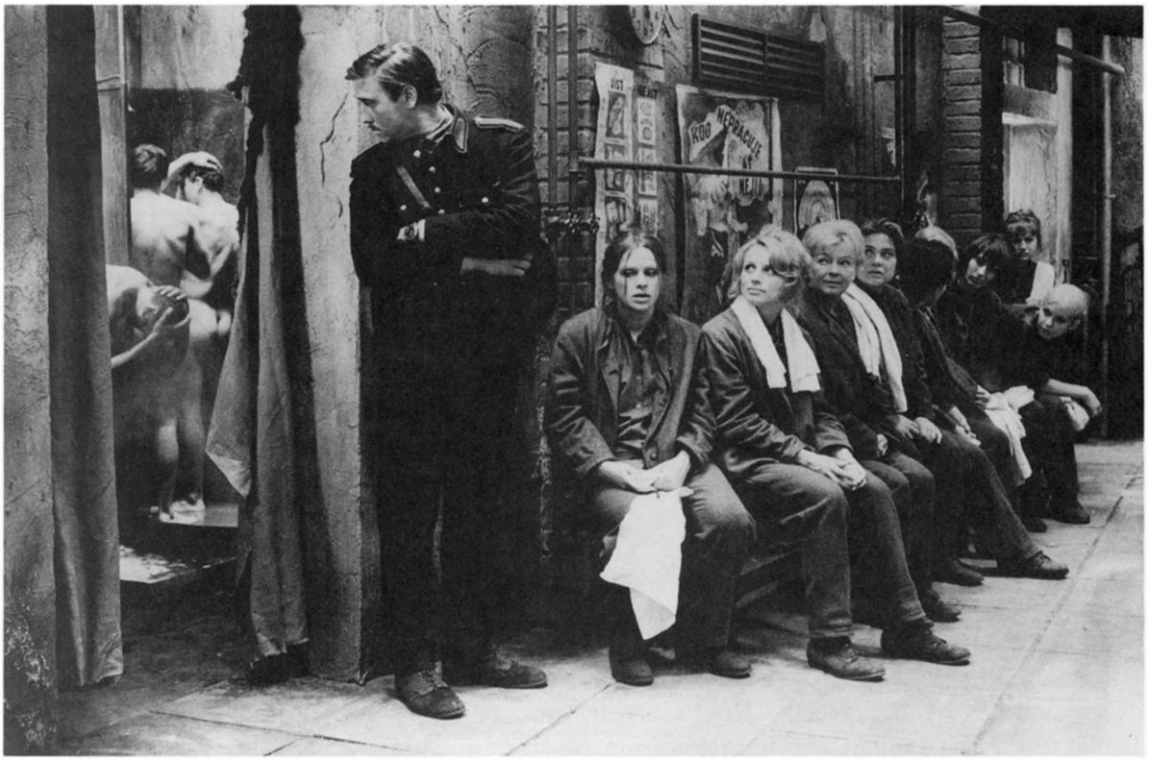
existentially accepts his fate, but the last image tells us otherwise: the men descend by lift into a shaft, a bleak netherworld, leaving behind and above a diminishing patch of light. The censors who shelved the film must have understood it clearly. Precisely because of Menzel's light touch, his rendering of the human comedy which against all odds blossoms into new life in the dung heap, the film is one of the most incisive indictments of communist bureaucracy ever made.

The guard's wedding is a similarly sustained piece of gentle whimsy. His bride is all silence, dance and movement. She leaves her groom to dance with one of the musicians, a graceful fiddler. On the wedding night she holds off her husband's heavy insistent body, leads him a merry chase around their rooms, flicking lights off and on. The shots outside their building, showing the windows flicking on and off to Jiří Šust's tinkly music, are magical, haunting, like a mid-summer night's dream. Another night, he finds the bed empty, discovers his bride asleep atop the armoire, like an alien creature unaccustomed to the comforts of a civilized bed. On another afternoon, the barber tells the guard a story about a man who comes home from work early to find his wife in bed with a stranger. The guard hurries home, afraid he will find his wife in flagrante. Instead he discovers her in the bathroom, burning a chair to sustain a fire, humming and chanting a gypsy song. Finally, we see him sleeping on the floor, his wife in his arms. Consummation can take place, and gratification too, when the husband enters *her* world. It is a tribute to Menzel's refusal to accept cliches and stereotypes that he goes to great pains to show the human side of the penal guard. By showing the vulnerable guard "learning the message of his love," and paralleling the unconsummated marriage of Neckář and Zelenohorská, Menzel has rendered their common humanity. The scene prepares us for the shot where the guard enters the circle of communal fire.

Menzel's sure technique makes it clear that the mountains of waste can deliver redeeming surprises as well as oppression. On his mound the guard retrieves from an abandoned headboard a metallic picture of a guardian angel. Later we see it up on a wall decorating his apartment. In another scene, rusty phallus-like objects are passed hand to hand among the men and women, and—as in "A Squeeze of the Hand" in *Moby Dick*—fingers touch in sensual communion. Again, the men and women are warming their hands around a fire. The guard, sensing the comradeship of the barrel fire, joins in to warm his hands as well. He has abandoned his role as policeman.

In Menzel's world sexual love has a kind of guileless assertion. It is more pagan than puritan. Separated by a wire fence, monitored by the guard, the men and women will nevertheless find a way to achieve communion of the flesh. At night the men line up behind the fence and watch the women disrobing as they prepare for bed. One of them remarks, "Did God ever create something more beautiful than a woman's body?" With a look of playful seduction, Zelenohorská waves at Neckář. The women are disporting themselves to arouse the men. Later, out in the yard, one of the women pretends to be getting something out of a man's eye. They improvise a retreat amidst the junk, touch, begin to make love. Later Neckář uses the same trick to get Zelenohorská aside. In another scene, we see the barber in his apartment flirting with his middle-aged wife. Their grown daughter reads a book and chides them for their playfulness. Are they thinking of having more children? Sometimes it seems as though the world is divided, to borrow Harry Levin's distinction, into Playboys and Killjoys. And in the long run the Playboys will win out.

Even the Communist foreman, played with maladroit consciousness by Rudolf Hrušínský, one of Menzel's favorite actors (in Prague I see that he is preparing to play Falstaff in *Henry IV* at the National), is a sexual being. Early on, he boasts that he is the only man in the yard who comes from a working-class background. Every once in awhile he picks up a piece of scrap metal and throws it clumsily on the transport cars, as though this iconic gesture certifies his solidarity with the victims. At first he seems to have avuncular feelings for a group of children whom he instructs in cleanliness. He produces a sponge and wipes the children's eager faces while he indulges in a pattern of affectionate play. Each time he is done with this ritual, he asks the local woman, "Is the water ready, on the boil?" He enters an inner room, but we do not see what he does. Is he indulging himself in a hot bath? Near the end of the film, we see what the hot water has been prepared for. The foreman removes his jacket and proceeds to bathe a nubile young girl. In the



The guard's futile job of keeping men and women apart in *Larks on a String* (Distribution: IFEX)

scene where the absurd perversion is revealed, he is joined by one of the local functionaries, who robustly enters into the spirit of the sponging. The innocent sponging of faces has turned into something more sinister, but it is an index of Menzel's world view that Hrušínsky's character remains comically human, if not humane. Menzel points out that the ritual washing is an exorcism of guilt. Each time one of the men disappears, the foreman is seen washing. In Menzel's films danger comes from war, bureaucracy, officialdom, not from human sexuality. To keep the bride and groom apart because of Neckář's question to the party official is to doom Menzel's characters to a kind of hell.

All this is rendered with Menzel's wry humor and indirection. Antonín Liehm has described it well: "Not a showy sense of humor, it is sneaky rather than brash, catching you unawares, always on the brink of tears . . . Menzel is a master of deflating anything that makes too much of itself, that is too serious, too tragic, anything conceited, anything pushy, or full of hot air. It isn't satire. Menzel just sticks his foot out a little, looking the other way, whistling a tune of utter innocence, and pompousness falls flat on its face, or scrambles out of the mud puddle, looking around helplessly to see who tripped it up." Menzel himself has shown a good deal of insight into his technique of indirection: "Look, when you water your flowers, you've got to have that thingamajig with holes in the spout of your watering can, for dispersion. If you just poured the water straight out of the spout, the concentrated stream of water would dig up your soil, and where would you be?" Again, "As soon as you strive too hard for anything, you destroy it." Menzel is fond of quoting an old Buddhist proverb: "You don't arrive at truth by dissection." The ultimate art of acting "is to be able to say, 'Go stick your head in the mud' the way you say, 'I love you,' and vice versa . . ." In a quirky low-keyed way, Menzel has become a prankster of comic paradox: "A dream fulfilled is the grave of creative activity." If this sounds like a justification of the artist's difficulty, it may be because Menzel has lived through, and survived, the suppression of dreams. He has gone down the mine shaft and emerged, still laughing, a little shy, a little sly, still performing his light-fingered magic, under that square canopy of receding light. That *Larks on a String* was made at all is a minor miracle of a porous tyranny. That it is now free to be shown at home and abroad is an incidental blessing of The Second Prague Spring.

Raymond Durgnat

Theory of Theory—and Buñuel the Joker

I. Towards a Jargon-Free Zone

Film, uniting so many media, separately displayed yet interacting, is an ideal laboratory for testing theories of art and thought, and a salutary corrective for disciplinary over-specializations. Yet recent studies by Barry Salt, Noel Carroll, and David Bordwell lament the long loitering of so much academic film theory in blind alleys. One major cause is plain. Film theorists, instead of checking theories from alien disciplines (notably linguistics-based structuralism, a rogue psychoanalysis fetishized on language, and EuroCommunist ideology theory) meekly adopted their paradigms and their unsupported assertions that their particular codes, structures, and unconscious mechanisms dominated all signs, discourse, meaning, and thought. Notions of a rigorously axiomatic system, which would supersede "bourgeois" culture and science and reorganize all knowledge, maybe combining a degree-zero radicalism with a few irresistible postulates, buried science and materialism beneath rationalist metatheories harking back to the eighteenth century.

The slower and more fruitful method is to theorize each element of film in its own terms, like a multidisciplinary "patchwork," letting the interconnections knit together gradually, as "knowledge" progresses. It's a pluralist-empirical procedure, and film theory's new task is to replace the weaknesses of French rationalism by the strengths of Anglo-Saxon empiricism. So far, "post-structuralisms" have only *inverted* that rationalism—substituting for its notions of rigid prespecification a sort of "chaos theory," proposing indeterminacy and solipsism. Already, Althusser's rationalism had reinvented Bishop Berkeley's absolute idealism, or come as near as makes no matter. For where the good bishop attributed the coherence of reality to God, the despairing EuroCommunist substituted a structure of structures as rigid and inhuman as God. (It's always worth remembering the affinities between theorizing and theology; it's no accident that Althusser was a severe Catholic, and it's arguable that insofar as Marxism is Hegelianism inverted it's a God-man relationship inverted. And for Hegel the State was Master Under God—whence recurrent slides from Hegel's totalizing tendencies to a politically totalitarian monostructure.)

But though post-structuralism accepts a "chaotic" solipsism, it generates no alternatives to arbitrary assumptions, which remain untouched. The problem is complicated by a widespread prejudice, left over from the romantic radicalism of the 1960s, and strenuously sustained by EuroCommunist ideology, against "bourgeois culture"—as if the bourgeoisie were always wrong, or had no theories. Yet modern culture bewilders, alienates, by its very profusion of theories, its inventiveness, its intensive materialism, its state of permanent revolution ("progress," the information explosion, computer science, etc.); in regard to all of which Marxism takes the old-fashioned, restrictive role of "moral guardian" (so attractive, alas, to educa-

The books discussed in this article are: *Philosophy of the Film: Epistemology, Ontology, Aesthetics*, by Ian Jarvie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987—$33.00) and *Diversions of Pleasure: Luis Buñuel and the Crises of Desire*, by Paul Sandro (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).

tors). Certainly film culture, if it wants to be *rigorously systematic*, as distinct from *rigorously correct*, must come to appreciate mainstream Anglophone philosophy, or, at the very least its theories of theory; its methodology (long closely linked with the successes of scientific materialism); its psychology which appreciates the constructivism of the conscious mind (as distinct from speculations about the unconscious, aimed at discrediting the conscious subject); its sociological approaches sensitive to the radical and structural differences between subcultures (as distinct from notions of a single set of institutional structures hegemonizing everybody); and its aesthetic sensitive to finesses and complications of meaning (as distinct from formalist and linguistic minimizations of meaning).

Ian Jarvie's title and subtitle should attract readers keen to reconnoiter philosophical styles, and though his argument is rather aloof from cinestructuralist ideologies, perhaps that's part of a cure. Or at least a *start* to a cure, for this is an uneven book. But to film studies it usefully introduces "ordinary language" philosophizing, which there risks being mistaken for no theory at all. Ordinary languages, far from being tied to the apron-strings of "bourgeois language," whatever that may be, easily accommodate radical theories of many kinds (as English accommodates Hobbes, Hume, Nietzsche, Bataille, Russell . . .); and they can usefully check technical terms which might disseminate errors throughout a theoretical system. Indeed, the extremist-radical form of logical empiricism, logical positivism, failed because its own "monostructuralism" (that of logic), *suppressed* too many other structures; but at least its scepticism about language avoided the structuralist-formalist failure to appreciate how radically different are the structures of (a) meanings contributed by the structure of language, (b) meanings in local units of language (notably, vocabulary/terminology), (c) meanings conveyed through language, (d) meanings appertaining to specific signifieds, and (e) meanings which never appear in language at all.

Whereas elaborate, "top-down" theories trip over the "infinite regression" problem, raised by theorizing theory, Jarvie discusses working approaches (methodology), in a conversational style derived from his philosophy classes. Though after technicality-studded styles it may seem almost naive, students exasperated or bemused by the gaps and clashes between inappropriate paradigms and their experience of film should find in "ordinary language" a blessed deliverance of mental muscles from cramp. On philosophical technicalities, Jarvie can be meticulous enough; thus Berkeley's idealism is usually assumed to be individualist, whereas Jarvie points out that it's "collectivist," thus strengthening the *rapprochement* with Althusser.

His subtending culture overlaps with this reviewer's, so he's also aware of a tension between the non-solipsistic scepticism schematized by Popper and "scientific realism," as Salt terms it. Jarvie invokes a sort of post-Kantian "bracketing" of the "ultimate reality" problem, whereby the mind neither creates the world nor merely mirrors it. From another angle, one might develop a hypothesis that the brain possesses sufficient similarity and interchange with the external world for the mind to "grasp" the latter, not "objectively," but *materially*; after all, the brain *is* matter, structuring mind. Jarvie's aesthetics derive from Gombrich, after which point we might well diverge: Gombrich's work centers on resemblance, i.e., realism, and hardly deals with non-iconic meaning; whereas resemblance seems to me only one type of reference. It wouldn't take too much effort, though, to make Jarvie, Durgnat, Salt, Andrew Britton (an incisive critic of theory), V. F. Perkins, and a few others, look like an "English school," or rather "tendency," working in related thought-styles, and with "correspondents" overseas, notably the exemplarily scientific Jean Mitry in France, and now Bordwell in the US, as he develops away from predominantly formalist (meaning- and history-minimizing) exegesis.

Jarvie's main interest is "philosophical aesthetics," rather excluding semiotics and semantics. His references to formalist, structuralist, and hard-Marxist propositions are short, scornful, and few (he's overly irritated by Terry Lovell's *Pictures of Reality*, which defends the realism traditional in left art against French Marxist notions that illusionist realism is bourgeois and modernism was progressive). Turning to philosophers theorizing film, Jarvie contrasts the sophistication of Munsterberg, way back in 1916, with basic errors in "moderns" like Stanley Cavell, George Linden, and Paul Weiss, on all of whom he is required reading. His arguments that film is an art (even though commercial, not hand-made, etc.) labor a case against

almost extinct objections. His long chapter on *Knowledge and Existence* includes a restatement of "willing suspension of disbelief" theory, one badly needed, given the notions of "photo-illusionism," and the literalistic identification theories propounded by Metz, Barthes, *Screen*, et al. His discussion of entertainment art as problem-solving games with experience usefully asserts art's main business against its exclusion by rigid linkages of fantasy and ideology. To Cavell's notions of film as "*the* world viewed," Jarvie counters splendidly that movie spectators accept a *plurality* of *auteurial* worlds, even when they're as wildly incompatible as the worlds of Bresson's *Mouchette* and Disney's *Dumbo*. Far from goggling like voyeurs, viewers involve themselves as morally mindful participants; and this allows Jarvie to tackle *as* philosophy films like *Casablanca* and *Annie Hall*. (Not that he goes deep; and he spends too long knocking other people's plot synopses—though that usefully teaches students how very tricky and strict a discipline synopsis writing can be.) He underlines the non-identificatory psychology of point-of-view shots, and does a swift demolition job on definitions of film in terms of mechanical apparatus. (He goads me to propose a definition—as distinct from a description—of film as a physical though non-mechanical *display*.) He's briskly helpful in asserting the discreet sophistication of bourgeois culture: its natural self-reflexivity, its awareness of ideological structuration. (On the last, he cites Collingwood's "Absolute Presuppositions," though more sociological formulations abound: "culture" in the anthropological sense, the vernacular term "way of life" (which links beliefs and social arrangements), Quine's *The Web of Belief*, etc.)

Sample demurrals. (1) Jarvie says that a fact exists only for a particular theory; but maybe a fact is a fact is a fact when it fits *many*, otherwise independent and rival, theories? (2) Following Goodman, he reduces resemblance to convention, which I fear parallels that rejection of resemblance as analogy which stopped Eco's often admirable *Theory of Semiotics* dead in its tracks. (3) He mocks Barthes for producing readings longer than the read; but a text must have more meanings than signs, and art texts tend to extremely high form/sign/meaning gearings. (4) He scolds philosophers for mistrusting words, but philosophy *requires* distrust of any given language, for much the same reason that arts as meaningful as painting, music, and film use radically non-linguistic forms.

His ordinary language makes demurral easy and pleasant, and many of his misses make useful sighting shots. (Thus, when he says that *all* documentaries distort what they show, it's easy to substitute for "all," "more than one might expect," and so reverse the thrust of the remark.) Paradoxically, the book's basis in class discussions may have generated its major drawback. Its basic ideas are sound, a rare thing, but the advanced reader, seeking detailed and sophisticated development of those ideas, soon feels fobbed off, as the argument rambles through reams of minor points whose pontifical treatment constantly lowers the tone. But especially for undergraduate seminars it sets an excellent agenda, with healthy and fruitful basics for talking around: notably his procedural rules, adapted from Gombrich (p. xiv) and Popper (p. 293).

II. A Structural Strangulation

The foregoing amounts to prioritizing a theory which is loose enough to keep many possibilities open over theory which prescribes correct and proscribes incorrect ways of reading—as do prevalent mixtures of would-be-rigorous theory and ideological aggressivity. Both functions are necessary, but the former sets the parameters of the latter, and should come first. To speak the language of "structuralism," they're the "higher"-level structure.

(For theorists of theory I might say that the criteria of validity subtending this piece come somewhere between Lockeian probabilism and Feyerabend's *Against Method*. Only where Feyerabend's butt is a certain kind of scientific narrowness, mine is a theoretical rigidity; and where Feyerabend's bias is solipsistic, mine comes somewhere between

Lakataos and gambling theory. Roughly: "Even if nothing is certain, the odds from theory and evidence working together leapfrog-fashion can get so long that every rational man will bet his shirt on, say, gravity operating reliably.")

Our case in point is Buñuel—with some author's self-criticism for just measure. My little book on Buñuel has been 23 years in print, but as a character in a Ionesco play says, and keeps on saying, "It's not enough by itself."

Cultural changes have compounded the perennial reasons for multiple approaches. Art-house and avant-garde films were geared not to exhaust their meaning but to reveal enough of it, in single or very few viewings; but now video permits "reader-controlled," repeated, close reading; and academic film study offers a new "density of interpretation." Art-house moviegoers, inclining to a humanism evoking Virginia Woolf's "common reader," treated films as accounts of experience ("content"), mediated by specific manipulations of forms of discourse, for critical consideration and adaptation by the spectator. Academia's interest in film has turned toward theories asserting that forms set by a "dominant language/discourse/ideology" dictated both content and response. Where humanism deployed deconstructionist techniques, like psychoanalysis, as adjuncts, to *add* meaning to "the manifest content," as Freud called it, structuralisms often sought to *disqualify* content as mere corollaries of this dominance. Linguistic paradigms overrode psychology; Lacan's "the Unconscious is structured like a language" was conflated with "content is structured by a dominant language."

The art-house moviegoer treated a film as a hypothesis of experience, perhaps radically unlike his own, or critically adaptable to it. The "monostructuralist" treats films as articles of faith, and reads for set, generalized, stereotyping forms, requiring "deconstruction" or "subversion"—arduous terms. Paradoxically, the educated moviegoer, who sought enrichment by a film's meanings, could rarely close-read it; while academia often deploys its interpretative privileges to impoverish and discredit educated meanings.

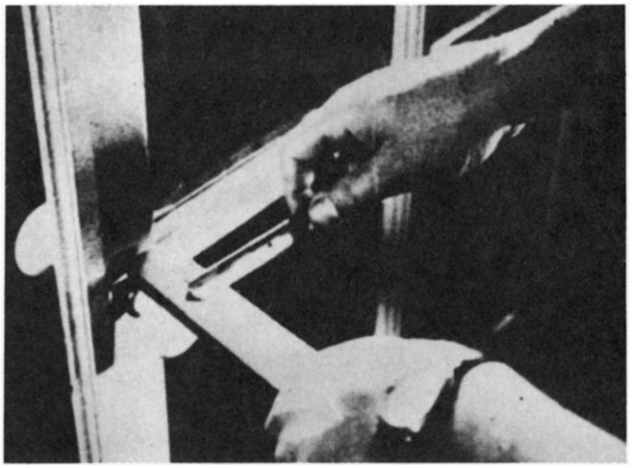
Buñuel provides some fascinating cases in point. I pursued a cultural nexus of Surrealist poetry-Freud-and-Marx, whose new angles on experience would give the spectator pleasure. Paul Sandro in *Diversions of Pleasure* deploys Lacanian semiotics to posit "Buñuel's perverse stance as a film-maker; his wish to turn spectators away from their ideological assumptions about the true and the natural and to force them out of uncritical viewing habits" (p. 152). In particular, his narrative "disruptures" would frustrate a "classical" spectatorial position of narcissistic and voyeuristic omnipotence, thus linking with Buñuel's stories of frustrated desire.

I proposed broad interpretations, Sandro's more specialized emphasis is sexual-cognitive mechanisms; the two approaches are now complementary, now contradictory. His rich harvest of readings must fascinate all Buñuel connoisseurs, if they're game to negotiate some knotty theorizing. I don't propose here to synopsize or review a rewarding book, nor to tackle all the perennial problems it suggests (when are readings definitive, mandatory, helpful, permissible, wrong but stimulating, etc.), but only to subvert some points in its subtending formalism; and to complement my observations on Jarvie's book by applying "ordinary-language" philosophizing to Buñuel's modernism. Sandro's sensitive analysis of Buñuel's "disruptures" often discuss clashes of implication, thus moving into the territory of Mitry's "logic of implication" and Piaget's assertion (against linguistic monostructuralism) of thought as a "constructivist" co-ordination of many and diverse mental structures, each and all open-ended to non-pre-specified data, in pragmatic-empirical-probabilist ways.

Modernism, an era not a movement, and embracing a wild diversity of ideologies, evinced two tendencies. One, majoritarian and humanist, was towards the enrichment of meaning, as in *The Waste Land* and *Finnegan's Wake*. The other, minoritarian, as in Dada, was towards the disruption of meaning. (As between them, a third option, "infinite ambiguity of interpretation," is . . . infinitely ambiguous; though its upholders, like this writer, swiftly introduce priorities, preferences, and various reasons to ignore, reject, reduce, denounce.)

Re-Reading Against Reading

"Close reading" doesn't eliminate ambiguities; often, indeed, it reveals, or multiplies them. Multi-



From the opening of *Un Chien Andalou*

viewing encourages multi-reading.

First-time viewers of *Un Chien Andalou* spot *some* of its continuity contradictions. A man starts his fall in a room, but completes it in a park. A girl in an upper room gives a *level* look and wave at a friend who, being on a beach, must be much lower; and though she's near an inner door the wind gusts around her as if she's out there already. But it wasn't until 1967, 22 years after first seeing the film in a Paris ciné-club, that I had ready access to a print, so that "close reading," undistracted by the dramatic-poetic excitations of first impacts, enabled a fuller discovery, with classes, of its "little disconnections," many no longer than those continuity "errors" which spectators know they're expected to overlook.

Notably, Buñuel, after sharpening a razor, steps out onto a balcony, and, according to most pre-analysis accounts, slits a girl's eye. But the fine detail says he can't have. For his shirt was open-neck, but the shirt behind the girl has a tie; the wrist has no watch; the balcony had neither girl nor chair; and after the moonlight chiaroscuro, the light is flat as if artificial. This last discrepancy suggests that the moon, though intercut with the razor-blade opening the lady's eye, isn't *there* either; and if you look closely, the eye has animal hairs. Though sixty years of filmgoers winced at the sado-Surrealist act which Buñuel has elaborately suggested, should we now conclude that no such act occurred; and (by the same logic) that there's no single scene: Buñuel is at A, the woman at B, the eye at C, the moon at D; there are two men with two razors?

Nonetheless: the indications of one continuous action-space are so strong, and the "dis-structural" detail so inconspicuous relative to the re-emphasized razor-edge, that even after analysis, the continuity obstinately proposes, as strongly as action across cuts establishes anything, one continuous action by one continuous man, with the moon *en face*.

How to read this simultaneous assertion and negation of continuity? Should we read the open-neck/tie shift as one character's sudden change, like the dying fall in two places: a poetic-symbolic contradiction-as-"condensation"? Or is the suggestion of continuity a booby-trap, the contradiction an alienation-effect? Is Buñuel exploiting, *only* to subvert it, the "continuity-effect," mainspring of "bourgeois" film-language (and most Bolshevik montage too)?

Certainly the "poetic" reading badly lacked a due sense of "disassociations"; and for *all* the "humanist" reasons listed above. The first-time viewer saw *enough* "contradictions," amidst subversive actions and implications, to grasp Buñuel's vision; but only close viewing reveals how carefully Buñuel constructed the filmic equivalent of flowing prose which fragments into anti-sense before your very eyes. All but lost, therefore, was its violent "disrupture" of meaning. Which would link with Buñuel's talk of "a passionate call to murder," with Bataille's "acephalism," with an anarcho-sado-libidinal rage against continuity, narrative, coherence, rationality, lofty social purpose, whatever. (Strictly speaking, they're meanings too, but generically different, and darker, Sado-dada-anarcho-nihilist, where

my nexus implied all kinds of rationalist moralisms—resisted in discussing the last film, but not re *Chien*).

Urgently needed was Linda Williams's formalist study of *Chien*'s meaning-subverting discontinuities. Philip Drummond followed up in *Screen*, compounding this "negative" formalism by militant denunciations of every poetic reading (including Surrealist ones) as tantamount to bourgeois repression. *Chien* was subversive not by its construction of meaning, only by its "disrupture" of "bourgeois language/ideology". Actually, Buñuel's "disruptures" *also* disrupt Marxist rationalism, and the formalist structures on which Drummond relies (Metzian syntagma, voyeurism theory, etc). Hence the *Screen* text *overlooks*, "reads over," or in its own denunciatory language, "represses," more "contradictions" than it notes. I don't mean to discourage the mental exercise (valuable though almost impossible) of seeing the film as unconnected images; more interesting is the construal of non-narrative connections (perhaps, like *Marienbad*, the episodes are rival aspects or versions of a single situation; or a description of a synchronic, non-narrative, state of Unconscious mind). But to reject the suggestions of ongoing action (implied narrative) is more repressive, more impoverishing, than to overlook the contradictions. For the "contradictions" depend on some powerful sense to disrupt—not vice versa.

More difficulties. (1) Normal continuity editing not only *allows* discreet contradictions, it unremittingly *demands* cheats and leaps, which look wilder and more impossible the longer you study them. They're possible because no spectator notices every formal element equally, but observes a priority of interest, with ongoing human action (sharpening that razor) high on the list. Some details have such low priority that we see but overlook continuity errors, like linguistic slips. (2) *Chien* very sophisticatedly combines three traditions: "classical Hollywood syntax" (useful if treacherous phrase); Russian montage (from contradiction comes "intellectual" meanings); and French "impressionism" (with its bursts of dreamy fades and cuts on matching graphics). Its own "norm" is unusually elastic. (3) Editing apart, the action switches between realistic narrative, improbabilities instantly implying dream or stream-of-consciousness status, and irrationalities whose meaning is poetic-symbolic or nothing. Thus *Chien* combines in one text the Dadaist structures of *Entr'acte* (Clair and Picabia, 1924), Maya Deren's impossibilist dream-cuts, Eisenstein's cream-separator sequence, classical Hollywood syntax, and jump-cuts.

Hence, its continuity can't be construed by those "formalisms" which would correlate film meaning with set forms resembling linguistic or ideological structures. The balcony/eye is a nice example: at first reading, it's an "ordinary syntagma" (a continuity like a theater stage), at close reading, not. The pseudo-continuity comes not from the *scene*, but from a common stress on razors, plus a shared moon. The non-continuity even separates from everything the moon-shot inserts which suggest them together. (Buñuel *reads as* looking at the moon, but all he literally does is look up.) And is the moon "part of" the human

"theatrical space(s)," or in its own "space," out there in the night sky hundreds of thousands of miles away, so that balcony/moon is not one scene but three-space parallel action? (That's another article, about the non-definability of space, therefore of scenes, therefore of syntagmas.)

The "disruptures" involve different *degrees* of paradox. The dying fall in a room and a park combines a continuous body-space (the same body falls *further*) with a discontinuous scenic-space. The cyclist/teacher relation is virtually *impossible* (the realistic hypothesis, that they're twins, is devalidated by so many unrealisms). The girl looks round as if she hears the cyclist in the street below; but distant cyclists are silent (unless he rang his bell, which would *normally* need showing). If the "realistic" hypotheses hardly occur to us, or seem immaterial, it's because *Chien* swiftly establishes a symbolic realm whose probable analogue is some succession of mental images, i.e., ideas: in text, diegesis is pre-text. Thus we "recuperate" the cyclist/teacher relation symbolically (as facets of one man, or doubles who meet, or *doppelgangers*, a mythic-poetic idea combining facet and double). The conflation Buñuel = hand using razor = cyclist is logically similar, signalling, or at least allowing, a symbolic relation.

To establish this "realm of the symbol," a stream of in-shot improbabilities, like the cyclist's improbable frills, would suffice, so long as between them they render "realistic" explanations (e.g., the frills are for a bet or a party forfeit) not logically impossible but improbable (since if relevant they would be specified). While the "disrupture," by editing, of "film syntax" supplements such improbabilities, it's no more subversive than they are. If we read "cyclist = teacher" nothing rules out "cyclist = Buñuel," as psychic facets (cf. *El*, Jekyll-and-Hyde, etc.). In that regard, the cut says nothing "classical" narrative couldn't paraphrase (perhaps the sex-maniac on the balcony always dresses very neatly to commit atrocities, etc.).

Meanwhile, the cut as a figure of form has a clear, "probabilist," analogue in dreaming. As if hesitant about this "recuperation," Sandro cites Williams's interesting distinction between "representing dreams in film" and "imitating the mechanics of dream through film." But the distinction wouldn't rule out the dream-analogy, for "representation" and "imitation" overlap, and similar mechanics would assemble similar continuities. And dreams routinely involve "impossibilisms." Recounting a dream, one might say "I shot my other self in a room, but then he was dying in a park . . . " or "Suddenly I wasn't on a balcony, but a woman sat there and someone who might have been me but was quite different . . . " And people tell their dreams as stories, i.e., as sequences of events-albeit-self-contradictory. Maybe dream-"ruptures," like riddles, stand for omitted connections or associations; though when they're omitted through repression is another subject. (The balcony "rupture" needn't signify a "repression"; the *El*-type narrative might dwell on the build-up.)

Contradictions occur not only in dreams, but in thinking generally (we juggle alternative hypotheses, break mental set, etc.). Our daily, waking stream-of-consciousness has less, rather than more, narrative or rational coherence than the dreams we remember. *Chien* is situated at a convergence of "stream-of-consciousness" movements: Surrealism (from Symbolism), the French "impressionist" avant-garde (so named for Impressionism, a mosaic-of-perceptions movement), Bergson, and Freud. *Chien* is easier to "make a story of" than many modernist continuities, e.g., *The Waste Land* or *Finnegan's Wake*—whose "micro-impossibilism" (fused phonemes, etc.) outdoes Buñuel's and Dali's "impossibilist" scenes.

"Positive" modernism involved, not the *discovery* exactly, but the exploration and use of conscious irrationality, to facilitate finer, deeper, freer, and *other* meanings. The bewilderment came from how flexibily and routinely thought recognizes and "recuperates" contradictions, puzzles, riddles, symbolic impossibilisms. *Chien*'s discombobulation and fantanglement of different structures (body-space, scene-space, graphic space, film-space, narrative consequentiality, etc.) depends on thought being neither tightly coherent nor incoherent, but capable of now foregrounding, now relegating, contradictions and continuities. It belongs with the work of Magritte and Escher; with the visual and logical paradoxes discussed in Patrick Hughes and Georges Brecht's *Visual Circles and Infinity* (1975); with types 6 and 7 of William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930); and a London infants' rhyme is right out of Buñuel's repertoire. "One fine day in the middle of the night/Two dead men got up to fight/One blind man to see fair play/One

dumb man to shout hooray/One dead donkey passing by/Kicked the blind man in the eye."

The Purloined Sexual Apparatus

Sandro's concern is less interpretation than explanation of the affective effect of "disruptures"-in-context. Buñuel's tales of teased desire also tease the spectator's desires, for vicarious participation, like an omniscient voyeur, in a knowable, unequivocal story.

Freudian theories of spectator sexuality include Simon O. Lesser's *Fiction and the Unconscious* (1960) and Norman Holland's *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968). Though the orthodox Freudian schools often overlook the complexity of those cognitive mechanisms which are preconscious but not Unconscious (repressed), they accept our ability to think thousands of diverse, unconnected, or contradictory structures: English, Latin, musical harmony, algebra, chess, geological (Lévi-Strauss's inspiration), ecological, molecular, atomic, genetic, visual-spatial, the various formal logics, and so on *ad inf.* To translate is to coordinate partly incompatible structures, within the verbal medium, simultaneously. Reading *any* film requires us to coordinate different visual structures well known in art theory (via Arnheim, Gregory, Vernon, etc.). The Unconscious structures stressed by cineLacanian theories, the mirror-phase, omnipotent voyeurism, and phallic or male desire, surely exist (leaving aside theoretical problems there) but they no more structure film-watching than they structure, say, ideas in ecology, geometry, or perspective. Here too, Freud's stress on "free associations," patterns structured by the subject's unique experience of his unique history, makes impossible the "abolition of the subject." The normal way to "deconstruct" a structure is to "compare and contrast" three (two hypotheses and the subject). We learn, or construct, new structures throughout our lives; thinking is pluristructuralist. Not only are my thoughts not a coherent whole, they're not even an incoherent whole.

As when, watching films, I sympathize with incompatible minds and ideologies: Belle de Jour's, Nazarin's, Bresson's Coutry Priest . . . It's extensively compatible with Unconscious pleasure. One might say that these films' Symbolic structures offer me a new self, which I accept because it's only temporary, and because a change is a good as a rest; and they merge with mine to revise my Imaginary. Film-watching is no more phallic, self-(mirror-) centered, or voyeuristic than any other self-forgetful activity, like reading or listening to music; like them, it's a re-creation.

With or without Freud, it's a truism that movie-spectators like daydreamers "lose themselves" in "regression" to an "imaginary world" as rich and safe as the long-lost womb; for Melanie Klein and "English school" psychoanalysis, the text, like *any* gratifying object, recalls "the breast." To this extent, film-watching is a response to The Other(s), in the plural, but with certain reality-barriers removed. I see them less exclusively from the outside, more fully from the inside. It's not a mirror, but a window, in which The Other, temporarily less "opposed" to me, and because only symbolic, not real, changes me.

Lacan's hyper-sexualization of thought imposes contortions like this: "In relation to the undifferentiated psyche of the newborn infant, the eye becomes nothing less than a generative organ, creating a sensory field in which the primordial cleavage between self and other can begin to develop." But isn't visual perception, and understanding, rather a linkage, a repairing of birth as a tactile cleavage? Verbal language suggests it: English says *I see* for *I know* or *now I understand*!, *take a look at* for *think about*; it speaks of *observation, speculation, insight*. Other sensory structures: *grasping* endows thought with fingers, *points* gives it external shapes in external spaces. Looking (whether at the face of a friend, or a film, through a microscope, or to read this page) is no more driven or structured by voyeurism (an aim-inhibited activity) than is learning, reconnaissance, re-vision. Universities are not, after all, Voyeurversities; no more are picture palaces.

Of itself, a formalism of the lack could assimilate nonverbal structures and emphasize the object of desire; the opposite-sex object which repairs the lack. Lacanian theory's phallocratic turn, its easy confusion of male, phallic, and patriarchal, and feminist acceptance thereof, are beyond our scope here; more to the point is its monolithic, phallico-linguo-ideological structuralism, and its vacuity as to *other* structures of other desires. Like the non-

patriarchal paternal. Like maleness as maternal.

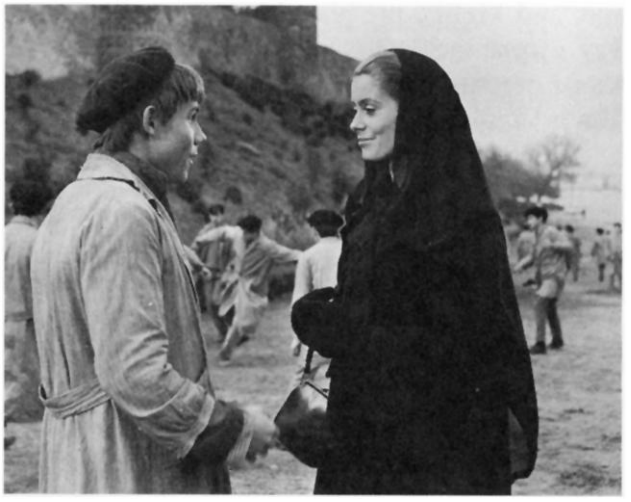
And like the female sexual apparatus, as, not merely an obscure object of desire, but a structuring subject thereof. *Chien* abounds in symbols for it: armpit, sea-urchin, male mouthlessness, the silent lacemaker—associated, in *Obscur Objet*, with a virginity unattainable and forever repaired, i.e., the eternal independence of female desire. An obscure object haunts Buñuel: in *Viridiana* it's "the camera my mother gave me," looking sardonically at the Last Supper. (Vagina as eye; it's that sly female retort to phallicity: "I can look up at you longer than you can look down at me"). But if female desire is, in Buñuel, obscure, it goes well beyond the vagina as *camera obscura*, and the "opposition," phallic convexity/vaginal concavity, overstressed in the summarily Freudian side of my 1967 comments on *Chien* (at least I emphasized paradoxical (ex)changes). Just as the female sexual apparatus incorporates the wedge, the breast, and the womb (as site of reproduction, therefore consummation of the sexual "project" of *both* sexes), so female desires thus signified are less centered, more diffuse and complex, than the male signifier; dependent on more *conditions* (including the desire of the male Other), more hesitant, more sensitive to emotionality, less to anatomy. If *Chien*'s picture of female sexuality is partial and perverse, its male sexuality is as bad; a razor signifies only sado-perverse aspects of the phallus, and contradicts the fertile and friendly ones. A constant Buñuel theme is a man who, both overweening (patriarchal) and weak (infantile), cheats a woman's sexual desires, provoking an ego-phallic perversity replacing his own. The heroine of *Chien* doesn't exactly "find her tongue," but pokes it out; *Tristana* has a tongue-and-bell dream, and begins *dictating* her terms; and Conchita "expands" her "obscure object," or rather apparatus, into an entire villa (if I may so "divert" one of Sandro's brilliant speculations). Nothing in this subverts "the" spectator's sexual ideology; he expects many a wife to dominate (restructure the mind of) her "family man," like a totem whom he experiences as a diffuse atmosphere, non-phallic, teasingly obscure-elusive-tender-contradictory.

As for male language, it tells us: to think is to *conceive*. To think about something is to accommodate its structures, to *espouse* them. Insofar as it's appropriate to sexualize mental structures, thought would *also* be vaginal; and the cunic not entirely different from the phallic. So there's a ludic start, no more, to de-phallicizing Lacanian insights. But isn't it simpler and truer to say that sexual fantasies and drives don't normally override other structures of knowledge? Maybe they rush into every vacuum of knowledge; even so, we rarely think mythically, *pace* Lévi-Strauss.

Which allows Buñuel's last films their several kinds of paradox, separately and together. The end of *Belle de Jour* juggles reality and fantasy. But if fantasy, whose? What's her reason, her new attitude? *Les Charmes Discrets* follows archaic/traditional ambiguities (dream/reality/text-within-the-text). *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* is Absurdist, between *Monty Python* farce and *Brazil* tragedy. *The Exterminating Angel* follows fantasy rules, except for omitting pseudo-logical explanations (whereby, say, flying saucers do it). In *Obscur Objet* only the double-casting transgresses routine cinematic practice. *Tristana* is virtually straight. All these films share, or allow, the same "objective correlative": a sense that life is a dream, which might, should, have been otherwise, and the proud dreamer is entitled to revise it like a lucid dream, *ad libitum*. "I've always dreamed of confusing dream and reality," said Oshima of *In the Realm of the Senses*. It's a traditional prerationalist feeling, from *The Tempest* (1611) through Dada and Ionesco to *Billy Liar* (who also chooses sado-fantasy).

Tristana fuses a dream-state and reality, achieving, via Saturno, a narcissistic-voyeuristic sexuality (like, yes, the film-viewing situation—but only an aspect of it). It's Tristana's sado-tragic, though magnificent, end. As a Madonna-on-crutches she also evokes Dali's Surrealism, which fused Surrealist and Catholic ecstasies and wouldn't have scorned the religiosity in the deaf-mute masturbating for her. *Fantôme* isn't ideologically simple either. It parodies rational propositions shared by secular bourgeois and radical culture, including: cultural relativism (a lecturer describes a toilet-party where guests sneak off to dine in the smallest room); the primacy of social discourse over biology (the responsible authorities tell a child not to interrupt while they're looking for her); and a general nostalgia for—"lack" of—lost animal ferocity.

Thus discourse in *Fantôme* "re-writes" reality as monstrously as Tristana's "religious spectacle"; except that it *also* abolishes the animal self, the bio-



Tristana

(eco)structure of libidinal desire. Sandro sees Buñuel's parody of radical hopes, of some "writing degree zero," contrasting with bourgeois tyranny; *Fantôme*'s "call for chains" calls for "the constraint of signifying chains" (p. 128). If my reading of *Chien* underestimated its anarcho-nihilist attack on meaning, Sandro's subtending theories subordinate *Fantôme* to theories which *exaggerate* the constraints of "signifying chains," deny the constraints of non-linguistic structure on signifying chains, and so make *every* ideology a mental tyranny, including its own.

But are Buñuel's spectators "forced to be free" or already freely and diversely complicitous-with-yet-critical-of the diversity of choices, say, Belle's discreet obsessions?

For Sandro the film *enables* us to reflect on the need to diminish freedom; for me it *develops* our dissent from radicalism as *a* new bourgeois ideology. If the difference is radical, it's also subtle, and each thought haunts the other. The more ghosts, the merrier . . .

Taxonomy, *Taxomanie*

To see how Buñuel disrupts narratives, Sandro turns to Greimas's "grammar" of narrative. But hardly has he expounded its linguistically-inspired distinction between *subject* (active) and *object* (passive), than he notes the paradox. In *L'Age d'Or* the lovers' embrace in the mud is mutual, so that *each* is subject *and* object; even if it's unilateral, *being embraced* can be *giving oneself* (active). Moreover, active and passive routinely *entail* each other. To pursue our rehabilitation of female structures of desire: "the phallus *penetrates* . . ." entails "the vagina *enfolds*," which is also of active voice. To *accommodate* might be classified as "a passive activity" but *enfold* and *capture* are as active as *penetrate*. The spider is as active as the wasp. Or consider that familiar figure of discourse, "man proposes, woman disposes," as a figure of sexuality. But in *every* sphere, Greimas's subject-object split excludes reactive response—including the Marxist dialectic (two *voices*, i.e., *subjects*), and the diversity of *interactions* on which narrative depends.

Similarly with Greimas's distinction between stories of rejection of the social order and stories of its acceptance. Many Buñuel characters *simultaneously* accept *and* reject it, as Belle discreetly pursues her private life; moreover, the brothel is *another* public order. Similarly, one accepts the narratological classification of *The Exterminating Angel* under the "mystery" pattern. But it also belongs to the "terrible house" pattern (posited by Robin Wood); to a "Robinson Crusoe"-will-they-survive pattern; to a "quest" pattern (like any story of wanting); and so on. This point isn't solipsistic, it's a reminder that taxonomy is the lowest form of science; it's non-explanatory, non-analytical, non-structuralist, and non-functionalist. Actually functionalism, derided by some structuralists, is as structural as geology, Lévi-Strauss's inspiration: it's the shaping of one structure by another.

Exterminating resembles many genres in one respect or another; belonging *with* all, it belongs *in* none. It "disruptures" us not by disturbing genre (quite normal in movie genres) but by mixing incongrous *trains of thought*: (impossible, implausible, unlikely, probable, indispensible), by the specific expectations of its specific story. It does so however we categorize it (mystery, sci-fi, fantasy-fi, Dada, Surrealism, Absurdism from Kafka to Ionesco and N. F. Simpson). Its *specific* mechanism evokes *Simon of the Desert*: miracles only alter the ordinary social rules (which are fancy-full already). It turns, incidentally, on *observation* of a visual-spatial structure.

Stanislaw Lem, the author of *Solaris*, points out, in the course of his fine hatchet job on To-

The Exterminating Angel

dorov's taxonomy of The Fantastic (which Sandro spares us, a pleasant surprise), that linguostructuralism clings to the law of excluded middle, whereby a work can't belong to two genres, patterns, structures, or modes at once. Saussurean "oppositions" induce the same problem. In ruling out so many structures, monostructuralism is aggressively antistructuralist.

In his main text, Sandro writes: "Barthes has written that the functionality of doing and the functionality of being are interrelated in the narrative text; an index of character may become pertinent to a unit of action at another level of the text." Barthes's remark is a truism (who doesn't assume that Hamlet's "being" is "pertinent" to what happens in *Hamlet*?) and sounds serious because it's invested with units and levels no sooner conjured up than overridden (because interrelations, functionality, and pertinence deseparate them).

In a footnote, Sandro cites Henry James: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" Valid as an assertion of, not simply character, but psychology, as "hegemonic" in *his* kinds of narrative, it's untrue as a generalization about narrative generally. For character and incident don't completely determine each other. Consider Belle de Jour. She's so much Deneuve that the very same incidents with say Moreau, Karina, Bouquet, Fonda, or Taylor would "interrelate" into different Belles. Conversely, Deneuve brings her *persona* to the radically different Tristana. Buñuel upfronts the paradox in *Cet Obscur Objet*: Bouquet and Molina are glaringly different in every way *except* incident-wise; the Jamesian novelist would describe them as different characters. The film is simultaneously one story and two.

Buñuel plays a thousand and one tricks on expected narrative directions, including *Objet*'s curious insistence on a *narration* situation which, like shaggy dog stories, ends in anticlimax. And there is the shaggy dog story inside *Fantôme* (mix monks, masochist, eloping lovers bent on incest, gypsy music, and the spiritual reaction is—nil). Buñuel's shaggy dogs paraphrase a familiar social experience: explosion averted, interaction aborted.

From this angle, form metaphors experience, recalling the poetic-symbolic reading of *Chien* (and likewise liable to short-change the experience of the form). Formalism, conversely, risks short-changing the experience signified: form is about itself, or other forms, which, dominated by the same structure, tend to be homologous. Whence the narrow self-referentiality lamented by David Bordwell in *Making Meaning. Diversions of Pleasure* has tendencies that way: the desire to know is like sexual desire, the narrative of *Objet* is like the burlap bag, and so on. But Sandro's work bristles with rewarding ideas, for "intra-linguistic" relations are very rich fields of meaning. Moreover, exegesis can be enriching albeit non-definitive; creative pattern-spotting and semantic sensitivity can operate apart from ideology; and an overly rigid theory can have heuristic value. Sandro's basic thesis, that contradiction means diverted pleasure means unpleasure, generates a theoretical "anxiety" which repeatedly stops at, and brings out, patterns which more elastic theories miss.

Back to Pluricontradictability, or, Dada Knows Best

Every movie involves at least two contradictory structures. The film shot is instantly and continuously *seen as* both a scene *and* "only" an image; conversely, the diegesis is "only" a narration implied by shadows in a cinema. The Unconscious responds to *both* as clearly as the Conscious, all of whose information it shares. As Jarvie notes, we see films not as mirrors-up-to-nature or windows-

on-the-world, but as "what if" structures, ludic gratifications of curiosity about hypothetical experiences—which *entails* film-makers thinking *their* worlds.

Since a movie is "already" logical play, that's all "trangressions of conventional narrative" can be. "Disruptures" routinely mainspring, not only crazy comedies" from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* to *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*, but narrative spectacles like *Buggsy Malone* (children as gangsters); they're an option to "straight dramas," as per *Our Town* (1940), *La Ronde* (1949), *Providence* (1977). They're rare in dramas simply because irrelevant to their usual interest: behavior in a consequential and coherent (though always surprising) world.

Which self-contradictory narratives usually frustrate, just as "1 = 2" would frustrate arithmetic. But 1 = 2 in *Obscur Objet*: Conchita = Molina + Bouquet. Buñuel started shooting with one Conchita, Maria Schneider, but her incapacitation inspired the double-up, which he later reflected was probably a mistake. My point is this: since the educated art-house spectator knows full well that these characters are also actors, and in a "Buñuel film," any alienation effect by itself is redundant, unless it *also* contributes some other effect or meaning. To interest us, it needs to enrich the overall poetic, even if it "collides" with part of it. *Objet* might have reconciled "classical realism" and "modernist relativism" by showing the story as differently imagined by the fellow-passengers to whom Rey recounts it (so long as, not having seen Conchita, each can imagine her differently). It's the *Rashomon* principle, but shifted from different witnesses to different listeners.

If *Rashomon* (1951) is "classical" where *Marienbad* (1962) is "modernist", it's only because the Japanese film works out, and spells out, a reality-compatible status for its "contradictory versions", where the Western film doesn't; the absence baffles, and so many explanations are possible that all lack conviction. (Between "classical" and "modernist," hybrid and combination forms abound, both art-house type and popular, but that's another article.)

"Classical narrative suspense" involves anxiety about not only desire-gratification (e.g. happy ends), but also the validity of our values. "Disruptures," when *serious*, refer rather to anxiety about the knowability of reality; to "philosophical doubt," now democratized, the "knowledge explosion" having multiplied competing hypotheses confusingly. This diagnosis evokes Sandro's scepticism about "the true and the natural" but attributes it to modernist flexibility; the spectator doesn't learn it from Buñuel, it's part of the knowledge of the world without which he couldn't even read the story in the images. He "subverts" the "illusion" in the act of responding to it.

Sandro fully acknowledges that "disruption" can generate hilarity, mockery, and liberation, but argues that Buñuel's narrative-tease films provoke only hollow and haunted laughter; their anxiety is severer than "normal" suspense. It's a valuable proposition. But I would say that many variables intervene, notably: how readily a spectator switches to poetic-symbolic "overdrive"; how realistic the diegeses contradicted seem to be; and whether they suggest suffering taken seriously. Departures from "realism" have never been a problem (Disney, *The Wiz*, etc.). Buñuel's films employ varying mixtures of "classical," diegetic, suspense ("what will happen to people we care about?") and textual "disrupture" ("what can resolve this paradox?").

Far from "classical narrative" putting the spectator in an omnipotent-voyeurist position, its suspense is *another* form of spectator vulnerability. We're involved with (identification) and concerned for (contemplation) the characters; we're vulnerable on both counts and critical in both capacities. The very word "suspense" conveniently suggests half-hanging out of a roller-coaster, screaming with the joy of danger. One might say that if the mirror-phase involves pulling-together a self, the roller-coaster is about pulling it apart (though our identification with *various* characters in *conflict* already does that). The roller-coaster, Hitchcock's metaphor, is psychoanalyzed in Michael and Edna Balint's *Thrills and Regressions* (1959). Chapters especially pertinent to our theme include "Flying Dreams and the Dream Screen," "Object and Subject" (re-Greimas's grammar), and "Reality Testing." Doesn't the post-modernist "excess of hypotheses" multiply the difficulties of reality-testing, reinforcing linguostructuralist denials of "reality" as a meaningful construct; whereas "monolithic" structures would conveniently reduce reality's structural complexity?

"Classical" editing requires so many discrep-

ancies of scene space, graphic space, edited space, and so on, so many jumps, only *subsequently* explained, of scene, action, and issue, so many purely provisional imputations of consequentiality, that, as psychologist Julian Hochberg remarked, it's a royal road to understanding how the mind works. And Piaget's *Main Trends in Psychology* leaves no doubt; thinking, from perception on up, is pluri-structuralist, in co-ordinating structures (visual, verbal, acoustic, etc.) radically and systemically different from each other, sufficiently loosely and flexibly to accommodate constant "re-view" of constantly changing input. Similarly, thought is efficient when it's neither too loose to register contradictions, nor too tightly coherent to suppress competing hypotheses.

Hence Buñuel's spectators aren't Greimas-type objects of his thought, but co-subjects, already thinking similarly-but-differently. On such "contrarious compatibility" culture depends, and no doubt the poetic and structuralist Buñuels are each other's Jekyll-and-Hyde. Sandro's voyage into their interface is often infuriating, always fascinating; this essay has sought to reintegrate his insights into *another* tradition of theory.

Reviews

Born on the Fourth of July

Director: Oliver Stone. Screenplay: Oliver Stone and Ron Kovic, based on Kovic's book. Photography: Robert Richardson. Music: John Williams. Universal.

In 1975, Peter Biskind referred to *Hearts and Minds* as "the Vietnam film to end Vietnam films, a million-dollar Vietnam spectacular." This characterization begs to be applied, *sans* irony, to Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*. In comparison, even the most visually baroque Vietnam films to date (Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, DePalma's *Casualties of War*) look as skeletal as a Bresson psychodrama. Our latest tour through the war nobody wanted is the most graphic and outsized yet. Wind-whipped American flags, pastoral panoramas, noisy casts of thousands, flying bullets, and the essential bodily excretions (blood, spit, vomit, sweat, piss, tears) are marshaled across an astonishingly wide screen with the color, pageantry, and approximate delicacy of a Radio City stage show engineered by de Sade. Oliver Stone has always leaned toward the excesses of seemingly blind, intuitive pictorialism, but in his new film he falls over, face-first, into those excesses, and he wants our faces right in there with his. The full range of his hysteria is now on view. Where can he, or the Vietnam film itself, go from here? Stone seems to have expended all the available ammo.

Fourth of July is the story of Ron Kovic, who in 1964 marched off to Southeast Asia a classic adolescent amalgam of John Wayne and Audie Murphy, convinced by family and country that Communists were in his backyard. He found minimal glory on the battlefield, or upon his return to the States. Paralyzed from the chest down by a spine-breaking bullet on his second tour of duty, he was shipped to the infamous Veterans Administration hospital in the Bronx, where nearly two hundred quadri- and paraplegic soldiers were forced to share their accommodations with rodents, garbage, and encrusted human filth. Eventually, Kovic grew his hair, clenched his fist, and began lobbying against the war alongside other disillusioned veterans.

This is the movie Oliver Stone has been working toward at least since *Salvador*, which established his style both aesthetically and politically. That was a considerable film, with imagery of great beauty and sophistication, but so frenetic and disjointed that it buried most of its own best moments. On balance it left one feeling profoundly (and unenlightenedly) dissatisfied. So, to varying degrees, did its successors, *Platoon* and *Wall Street*: in each, there was ample evidence of great muscle and minimal thought, a mad visual flair un-

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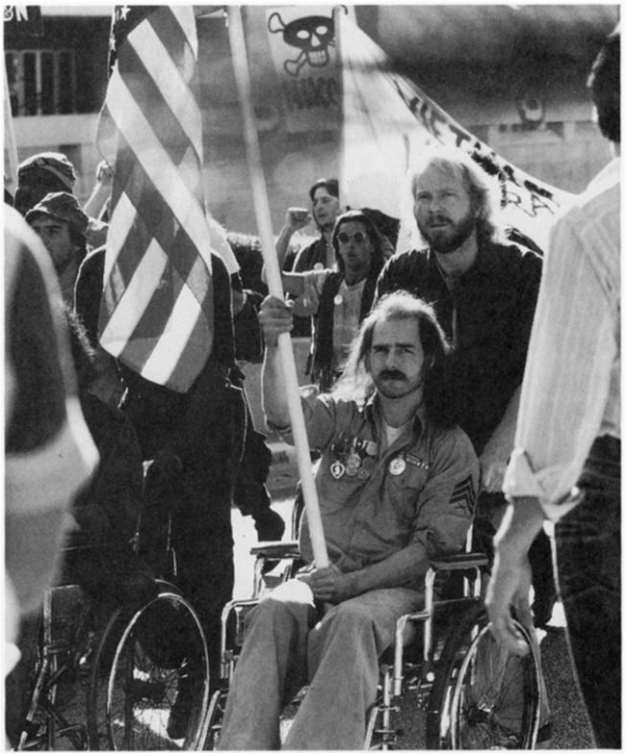
burdened by prosaic notions of stylistic or narrative cohesion. (*Talk Radio*, which followed, was an aberration in this regard: while conceptually an extension of Stone's own fixations, it was formally so circumscribed by the tight emphasis of Eric Bogosian's stagebound original that Stone was compelled to direct it in a remarkably subdued, streamlined style.) *Born on the Fourth of July* takes this director's virile vision to its (probable) extreme, and the result is, on the whole, rather repellent. In itself, this is not the worst thing for a movie to be; it just isn't the best thing for *this* movie to be.

Why repellent? Not simply because the film is loaded with grotesque imagery (which is called for) and wince-inducing immediacy (which isn't, always). A more severe disgust is provoked by its one-eyed view of the material it covers, because this view amounts to little more than a particularly bloated brand of aesthetic propaganda. Ron Kovic's triumph over disability, abuse, and neglect reads like an honest, heartening story of real-life heroism, and in real life it was. But Stone breezes past the richer complexities of "mere" realism in his furious pursuit of grandiose, movie-derived iconography. His apparent purpose is to minimize our consideration of the story's political components, and to enforce our shellshocked acceptance of his own interpretation of Kovic's nightmare. He will show us the blackest black and the whitest white, but not a shade of grey.

Those familiar with Stone's work will recognize this as his preferred political dynamic: each of his films—with the exception, again, of *Talk Radio*—has favored a cut-and-dried pre-definition of issues over a pluralistic response to them. (He put his cards on the table in *Platoon*: the crucifixion-by-gunfire of Elias and the hellfire in the homicidal eyes of Barnes were shot in slo-mo so nobody would miss the point.) Even if such reductive story-craft struck some of us as artistically inadequate, it was acceptable, at least theoretically, in his earlier films: although the settings were real enough, the characters moving within them were recognizable as fictive creations, and so Stone was free to manipulate them as he wished. But now he's dealing with a protagonist who is also a real person; his method of either mangling or shrinking the issues of fit the faceless, mythic demands of his own sensibility seems meretricious. The issues under examination are not only of Vietnam, but of Kovic's life; de-



Tom Cruise in *Born on the Fourth of July*

limited as they are by Stone's pinched perspective, justice is done to neither.

The slanting begins with the credits, under which are arrayed symbols of the suburban *Life*-style that, in the film's view, was responsible for mutilating and embittering Kovic. Archetypal families gather on the main street of Kovic's home town for an Independence Day parade; fireworks explode over a summertime idyll; little boys play war; Mom and Dad smile. Never mind that such stock images aren't rendered visually convincing; the ideas behind them—Mom/flag/apple pie—are too remote from reality, too ready-made, to be taken as anything more than simple deck-stacking. As a consequence, the savagery of Ron's wartime experiences—while effective on an immediate, visceral level—loses much of its resonance upon reflection because its polar opposite has been too superficially contrived. Later on, when Ron returns home and experiences the antiwar demonstrations, protest songs, and hippie peace gestures of the late sixties, such deck-stacking takes the form of a vague, amorphous brief on these epochal events. Social movements of great intricacy are freeze-dried into automatic, received images, the politics that bred them rendered unintelligible by the director's

avoidance of contextual detail. Stone seems to think he's summing up an era with shots of Abbie Hoffman exhorting a collegiate crowd and brandishing his famed middle finger. This is the diminution of modern American history: the events have no existence beyond our collective (largely media-defined) nostalgia. The nebulous issues are usurped by impersonal, push-button images that, for all their sound and fury, are imaginatively static. The result is that Kovic's story seems abstracted from the social, moral, and political agents that shaped it; because the forces surrounding him lack specificity, his own story is robbed of many of its larger implications.

Contributing to this onerous texture is the black-wash applied so ferociously to Kovic's mother. Although Stone has never been kind to his women (in *Wall Street* Daryl Hannah was made to seem about as animated as a front-lawn flamingo in designer formals), the character of Mrs. Kovic is handled with an ostentatious, almost morbid cruelty. She's scarcely even a straw woman, standing as she does for nothing more than blind Americanism and matriarchal repression at all costs. Never is she allowed to voice anything but the most torpid, poisonous banalities, and we're given no alternative but to either detest or heckle her. ("The Communists have to be stopped," she says to Ronny in the fresh, dimply prewar days, adding that God's will is what's sending him to Vietnam; hatred sanctioned by ideology informs her every pronouncement.) Ron Kovic may loathe his mother as much as the film indicates he does, but at one time he must also have felt love. The film cheats by allowing the audience to experience only the loathing, by scoring easy, didactic points off his hindsighted recognition of her Catholic/patriotic mania. Employing one of the pivotal people in Kovic's life as a generic symbol of establishmentarian wickedness cheapens the entire film, and is symptomatic of it.

The only scenes that remain scary and tangible in the memory—that seem unhindered by an imposed rhetoric—are those set in the VA hospital. These images of neglect, abuse, squalor, and degredation (they look like outtakes from Fred Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*) contain a power that works on a more truthful level than anything else in the film. For once, Stone's blunt, tactless style works in his favor, because this is a story that doesn't have two sides; it isn't incumbent upon him to locate this particular brutality within a wider context. Granted, it's one thing to be jolted by the sight of musclebound rats patrolling the festering floor of a government-run hospital, and quite another to be moved by a film-maker's expressive transformation of such a scene. There is a difference between an artistic rendering of the grotesque and quasi-journalistic muckraking—a difference between Celine and Upton Sinclair. But these cathartic passages blur the conventional distinction between aesthetic and emotional reactions; we don't know (and don't care) if we're responding to the inherent horror of the material or to the director's method of framing it. Stone, to his credit, must have realized that this segment of Kovic's story didn't require his customary visual rhetoric to provoke an honest response. More's the pity, then, that he didn't apply the same restraint, the same quiet contemplation of a personal abyss, to the rest of the movie.

It seems necessary to say something about Tom Cruise's interpretation of Kovic, which has been highly regarded. His performance is brilliant—but only by the variable standards his previous work has set. He's a good physical match for the real Kovic, and his willingness to be unattractive is admirable. But his fearlessness and drive don't add up to a character whose growth we can feel; despite his long hair and dripping mustache—not to mention Stone's rabid use of brawny closeups—he still seems like a kid at the end. (This disparity isn't eased by Cruise's little-boy voice, which lets him down far too often. When Kovic screams "Fuck you!" at his mother, the shrill, squawking epithet carries unhappy echoes of Emil Jannings's chicken act at the end of *The Blue Angel*.)

Born on the Fourth of July is not an instance of what Susan Sontag called "reflective art," in which "the pull toward emotional involvement is counterbalanced by elements in the work which promote distance, disinterestedness, impartiality." Stone puts no stock in any of these things, and he likely wouldn't know how to achieve them if he did. Reflective art also "imposes a certain discipline on the audience—postponing easy gratification." It is precisely this easy (political, moral) gratification that is Stone's stock-in-trade, and in the course of providing it, his film screams itself hoarse. Long before the arrival of its grand peroration—Kovic enters the 1976 Democratic convention in the benedictory

glare of celestial floodlights—it collapses under the accumulated weight of Stone's formal excesses. The entire picture is inadvertently symbolized by a frantic, garrulous scene in which Kovic and another chairbound vet compare wartime atrocities, trade insults, and grapple in the desert dirt, grimacing and gesticulating with the overdrawn ebullience of the combatants in a George Grosz painting. Like the boozing, brawling ex-soldiers, the film is engaged in an ouch contest, but only with itself. In scenes like this, as in most of the film, Stone isn't telling us about Ron Kovic or Vietnam or the United States so much as staking out new unsavory film territory! Grand Guignol, American style.

DEVIN MCKINNEY

Jesus of Montreal

(Jésus de Montréal) Script and direction: Denys Arcand. Photography: Guy Dufaux. Editing: Isabelle Dedieu. Music: Yves Laferrière. Orion Classics.

According to Coleridge, the best works of art don't tell new truths, but rescue old ones from "the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission." Despite some flaws, such is the case with Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*, a French Canadian prizewinner at Cannes in 1989 and a nominee for Best Foreign film at the 1990 Oscars. "It is not a story," one of its characters says at one point. "It is *the* story."

At the very least, it's a hard story to present freshly. Indeed, as Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* attests, it's easy to get lost in the attempt. That Arcand (who directed *The Decline of the American Empire*) in large part succeeds is to his great credit. More surprising is that he does so by using some of the sly humor so evident in his earlier work. Although sprightly wit is not usually an element in a film with a serious religious tone, a characteristic Arcand wryness is often what makes *Jesus of Montreal* credible and compelling.

Jesus concerns an actor named Daniel Coloumbe (Lothaire Bluteau) in present day Montreal who takes his work in Passion plays with intense sincerity. With eerie night-time cinematography by Guy Dufaux (a collaborator on *Decline* also), Arcand films the plays as they are performed at a shrine atop Mont Royal, where they attract moderate but highly enthusiastic crowds and become the focus of Daniel's general crusade for less commercial, more innovative theater. Through a sequence of parallels that develop between Daniel's art and life, the film renews some of the Gospel's truths in a forceful, sometimes overpowering way.

One example: an entertainment lawyer (played with superbly cool, greasy suavity by Yves Jacques, who also appeared in *Decline*) finds out about the plays and their enthusiasts, then tries to lure Daniel toward megabucks through wider exposure, bigger productions, publicity tours—the works. The lawyer is so corrupt that he assumes Daniel's quiet seriousness is merely a savvy attempt to feign sincerity; everything, he thinks, comes down to marketing. "This city is yours," he says, gesturing out beyond a glassy rooftop restaurant overlooking Montreal where he mounts the seduction. Jacques underplays so naturally that it takes a moment before Arcand's intent registers: the scene is a modern temptation in the hi-tech wilderness, a glitzy version of Matthew 4.

Such serio-comic satire is evident throughout *Jesus of Montreal*. It begins seriously, with Daniel ending a (secular) play in which he has to commit suicide, after which he opens his eyes to hear audience applause. The setting is unreal and theatrical, but you can see by Bluteau's brooding look—a good piece of telegraphing—that Daniel easily crosses the line from art to life. "Tragedies sometimes bring bad luck," a friend advises. But the mood created by the suicide dissolves into frivolous post-performance cocktail party chatter among Daniel, his friends, and an "inside" theater crowd of agents, producers, and hangers on.

Soon Daniel discovers a cause: a Passion pageant that a priest in charge of the shrine asks him to stage in the old-fashioned form of "miracle plays" going back to the Middle Ages. With typical sincerity, Daniel makes the mistake of doing some research that leads him deeper into the subject matter. He also enlists other actors in the not-for-profit work, dragging one, for example, away from some commercials he was making; though not a tax gatherer, he is a stand-in for St. Matthew, the "publican" whose recruitment by Christ is recounted early in his own Gospel.

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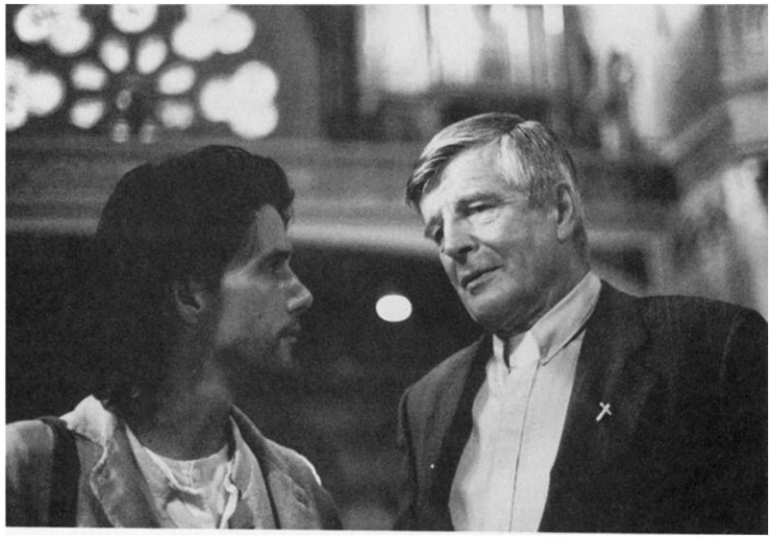
These parallels ultimately cause some problems. Initially, however, Arcand deftly mixes tones to

keep us off-balance. He constantly leavens seriousness with wit, light touches, and some good satiric fun, especially in jibes at the media and its gross commercialism. At its midpoint, *Jesus of Montreal* could be described as either comedy or tragedy. As a result, when things later become serious, the developments are both surprising *and* fulfilling. Despite some underlining, the religious feeling in the film seems real because, for the most part, Arcand knows how to make suggestions without overdoing them—indeed, he knows how to make suggestions and then subvert them. You feel the story's power because—most of the time—Arcand isn't always pushing it.

As Arcand says of his inclusive, whimsical style, "I wanted to make a movie of ripping contrasts, from madcap comedy to absurd drama reflecting the life around us, shattering, trivial, contradictory." Arcand describes its splicing between heartfelt evocations of the life of Christ and media-mad modern Montreal: "Thirty-foot supermarket displays presenting the most unlikely collections: novels by Dostoevsky competing for space with eau de toilette, bibles, pornographic videos, the collected works of Shakespeare, photographs of the earth taken from the moon, archeological forecasts and posters of Jesus, while loudspeakers with electronic boards pulsate endlessly against a backdrop of Pergolesi, rock 'n roll, or raucous voices." Neither the video nor audio of *Jesus* is that crowded, but its synthetic texture is that rich.

Paradoxically, this collage technique, this grounding in the confusions of everyday reality, makes the religious feeling behind the film that much more sensible. We can follow Arcand into mystical territory because it's clear he knows the state of the world—or at least the state of pop culture. It's apt that Arcand includes Dostoevsky novels in his collage: the Russian had his own version of Coleridge's nineteenth-century project, and was always on the lookout for modern "Christs" (the "idiot" Prince Mishkin, Alyosha Karamazov et al.). Like *Decline*, Arcand's *Jesus* has the intense sincerity of an elliptical fifty-page conversation among a group of Dostoevsky's radicals.

As in *Decline*, Arcand is greatly aided by the ensemble acting of the cast. The corpulent Remy Girard plays one disciple; he was an adulterous husband in *Decline* and in *Jesus*, aptly, Daniel lures him away from dubbing porn movies. Johanne-



Jesus of Montreal: Daniel (Lothaire Bluteau) and the priest (Gilles Pelletier)

Marie Tremblay, forty-something, with a drawn, tired but expressive face, plays Constance, an actress friend of Daniel's who has an affair with the priest (Gilles Pelletier) who initially sponsors the play. Tremblay is Daniel's "constant," loyal to the end; interestingly, she recently worked with Gabriel Arcand, Denys's brother, on a stage version of *The Idiot*. Pelletier, a veteran of Hitchcock and Preminger films, eventually betrays Daniel when the Passion plays become both too heartfelt and unorthodox; he brings to his role noxiously self-pitying corruptibility. Best of all is Catherine Wilkening as Mirielle, Arcand's "Magdelen," an actress whom Daniel impulsively rescues from doing a bare-breasted beer commercial. In Arcand's new "cleansing of the temple," Daniel explodes at a rehearsal, overturning pricey video equipment in the studio where Mirielle is about to perform. She is sensuous, spirited, vulnerable—and Arcand's central image for matter yearning for more.

Sometimes Arcand goes overboard and makes things too pointed. Once the "disciples" are gathered, for example, they start performing the Passion pageant, including scenes of the crucifixion that outdo most older religious movies in gruesome spectacle. At one performance, Daniel is propped, naked on the cross, his legs crossed to obscure his genitals; as the crowd moves on to the next scene, he hangs there as two of its members come to arrest him—police with a warrant because of his destruction of the studio. As Daniel descends, the cop who cuffs him says the play is good. "It gets to you," he declares. But of course, Arcand's point is that it *hasn't* gotten to him; otherwise, he wouldn't be arresting a modern Christ. Arcand also brings the media lawyer back one too many times

to score some heavy-handed satirical points. Despite the joke of using a Jewish hospital, he also closes the film awkwardly by resorting to the technology of medical transplants to suggest how one man might die so that many might live.

Still, an aura of mystery dominates, sometimes fostered by Arcand's ability merely to suggest parallels, and stop there. Constance and the priest, for example, can be seen in many different ways: with her free-wheeling sexual style, Constance has a touch of Magdelen about her; the priest is also caught by Daniel in Constance's flat, literally with his pants down, and can therefore be seen as a sinner (less of the fleshly sort, and more of a hypocritical Pharisee). But as two older figures, the pair are also Daniel's mentors, possibly his spiritual mother and father—stand-ins for Mary and Joseph, perhaps, or Mary and some other parent (as Daniel's research on the historical Jesus suggests). When the priest betrays Daniel, he is also a Judas —and, on deeper levels, a Church that doesn't want its lessons taken seriously, or a tradition that only wants a show (Arcand gives the media lawyer the name of Richard Cardinal). Even deeper, the priest suggests an old divinity that betrays human trust.

None of these associations are exclusive; all interact to give *Jesus of Montreal* a multi-layered texture of tragedy and transcendence. Even the apparent reductiveness of the medical conclusion leaves a residual suggestion that a life of the spirit endures beyond the body. Daniel Coloumbe is not just a Christ-figure but also, as "colombe" or "dove," a stand-in for the Holy Ghost.

Arcand speaks in moving but tentative ways about his own religious feelings; he was, like most French Canadians, raised as a Roman Catholic, and in the hyper-ritualistic, mystery-oriented ecclesiastical ancient regime before Vatican II. "There will always be a yearning for that time in my life when religion provided soothing answers to problems to which there are no answers," Arcand says. "To this day, I cannot help but be moved when I hear: 'Where your treasure is, there your heart is also,' or 'If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that?' Through the thick haze of the past comes the echo of a deeply disturbing voice." Though unsure of its meaning, Arcand echoes that echo, even those very words, throughout *Jesus of Montreal.*

Perhaps the strangest scene in the film occurs not in the Passion plays but in a library where Daniel, doing some initial research, is quietly confronted by an older woman librarian who notices what he is reading. "Are you looking for Jesus?" she asks, then draws away and adds enigmatically, "He will find you." The exiled Joyce used to tremble at thunder and excuse himself to continental literati by saying, "You were not born in Catholic Ireland." No one born in the Catholic tradition pre-Vatican II will fail to read Arcand's library scene as an encounter with an angelic "messenger" —the kind that always occurred in the "Lives of the Saints" that all Catholic children dutifully used to read.

Arcand's residual Catholicism doesn't overpower *Jesus of Montreal.* For all his pushiness with parallels, he is understated compared to Scorsese in *The Last Temptation.* Once Stanley Kauffman wrote: "After a while you get the feeling that Scorsese reads scripts looking for the hysterical parts." *Last Temptation* is no exception. In their (justified) rush to defend the film from the malice of contemporary Puritans, many critics failed to note that the use of sexuality in his film was part of the same tendency to garish hyperbole that characterizes Scorsese's work at his weakest. *Jesus of Montreal* succeeds better at contemporizing the Gospel because, whatever its faults, it doesn't posture as much, as heavily—or as neurotically.

Indeed, it succeeds exactly where Scorsese fails —with sex. Arcand's Christ and Magdelene are shown as intimate, and loving, but the closest we get to sexual contact is a short scene of Wilkening washing Bluteau's upper body in a bathtub. Could Scorsese have been similarly indirect? Of course.

Daniel with Mireille (Catherine Wilkening)

Why wasn't he? Not a desire to offend—as the fundamentalists charge—but his unconscious share in the sex-obsession of our age, the sex-mad Puritanism he ostensibly wanted to attack. The less heavy-handed *Jesus of Montreal* conveys by sweet suggestion what *The Last Temptation* so dumbly overplayed: someone with a Mission still has human feelings. The bath scene perfectly fits the understated, anti-materialistic tone of the film; so too does the scene where Daniel lures Remy Girard from porno flicks. Arcand's vague nostalgia for the letter of the Gospel is here supplemented by a keen grasp of its spirit. As in *Decline*, he uses *Jesus of Montreal* to depict tender sexuality in apocalyptic battle with diseased sexual imagination.

Most remarkably, Arcand has made a film that brings alive the original temptation story in Matthew 4—exactly what Kazantzakis and Scorsese implicitly present as outdated. In Matthew the Devil tempts Christ with bread, power, and the invitation to betray his trust and take command of legions of demons. In Scorsese's rendition, the emphasis is mostly on sex, and the devil speaks with Barbara Hershey's vocal chords. Arcand restores the focus to broader temptations to deceit and power—the kind that both Puritans and anti-Puritans are likely to miss. By being traditional he is ironically more up to date than Scorsese, indicting the fashion for greed and celebrity that have made lawyers like "Cardinal" the power brokers of our age. *The Last Temptation* omits such evils. *Jesus*, without its narrow focus, nails them.

Both films share in a recent trend toward better film-making on religious themes—one that sometimes recalls the work of dead or retired masters like Dreyer, Bresson, and Bergman. Alain Cavalier's *Therèse* and Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast* are other examples. These directors don't provide records of faith, but search for something to believe in. "We haven't yet recovered in the Western world from the disappearance of religion," says Arcand. "We haven't recovered from the shock of Hegel. We are trying, like Jesus/Daniel, to find a kind of code of ethics, a moral doctrine, in the middle of the endless contradictions."

On American screens, the treatment of religion involves a different contradiction. Old Biblical epics told of mighty miracles, and pious lives of saints were filled with tremulous violins and halo lighting—treatment today reserved for benign extraterrestrials. Now, films go to opposite extremes and revel in ironic assault on religion, with hyper-puritanical ministers (*Footloose, Light of Day, Crimes of Passion, Mosquito Coast*, and *Shag*); hypocritical priests (*True Confessions, Monsignor, Mass Appeal* and *The Chocolate Wars*); fuddy-duddy church ladies (*Witches of Eastwick*); and fast-and-loose caricatures of Catholicism (*Agnes of God, The Name of the Rose*, and *Hannah and Her Sisters*). Despite televangel scandals, it seems stupid that the main thing to take the place of bygone religious film-making has been travesty. Naivete has simply yielded to sophomoricism.

In this context, *Jesus of Montreal*, *The Last Temptation*, and several other films are distinguished because they avoid two kinds of cliches—the cliches of belief or disbelief according to the cult of Irony. By avoiding easy affirmations or negations, these films provoke thought on existential issues in a way that hyper-pious films do not encourage and Irony forbids. In its complicated, sometimes faltering, but mostly ingenious and impassioned blend of humor and idealism, *Jesus of Montreal* is, at times, the best of the lot.

TOM O'BRIEN

Kieślowski's "Short Films"

A Short Film About Killing

Script and direction by Krzysztof Kieślowski. Photography: Slamomir Idziak. Music: Zbigniew Preisner. Editor: Eva Smal.

A Short Film About Love

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When Krzysztof Kieślowski's *A Short Film about Killing* was named the recipient of the first European Film Prize, the "Felix," at the end of 1988, few filmgoers were familiar with Kieślowski's work. In a competition that included Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* and Louis Malle's *Au revoir les enfants*, the judges' choice of Kieślowski's strange and uncompromising film seemed to many European critics to be a deliberate provo-

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cation: both a European declaration of independence from the entertainment values of Hollywood and from the usual film festival adulation of big-name directors. Known primarily as a documentarist, Kieślowski had previously made important but minor features—in particular, *Camera Buff* (1975) and *No End* (1984)—and had won festival prizes for several other films, but was overshadowed by Poles such as Wajda, Zanussi, and Holland. Further, Kieślowski did not fit the usual "important director" mold: a one-time film professor whose recent work had been financed primarily by Polish television, his work is deliberately modest. (*A Short Film about Killing* and *A Short Film about Love* cost a fraction of even the absurdly low costs of most Polish features and both are, indeed, short by theatrical standards, at 85 and 90 minutes respectively—hence their titles.) The two films were produced as theatrical by-products of a Decalog on contemporary issues suggested by the Ten Commandments (and in which shorter, one-hour versions of the two "short films" also reside). But as his "short films" moved into European distribution, critical attention to Kieślowski did not abate. Though his work remained outside of any mainstream aesthetic, Kieślowski was invited to festival after festival, either as a participant or as a judge. Many European intellectuals now regard him as perhaps the most important, and certainly the most disturbing voice in Polish cinema. I will suggest why that is so and propose some terms in which Kieślowski's work might be understood.

What is special about Kieślowski's work? First, his starting point: a near-total despair about the everyday realities of housing-project Poland. For critics such as Munich's Peter Buchka,* Kieślowski's films are brilliant autopsies of a society where nothing works, not even everyday human connections between people; it is a land so moribund that (as Kieślowski has mumbled in interviews) no social movement, and certainly no work of art, can have much effect. Partly it is that the communal aspect of culture has broken down: lives are atomistic, with social structures keeping people apart rather than bringing them together. And partly the problem is ontological: Kieślowski sees the lives of individuals as ruled largely by chance rather than by fate or even probability. Like almost everyone in Poland's cities, Kieślowski's characters live in drab concrete silos, virtually caged, cut off from normal contact: their loneliness is nearly total, and their attempts to escape loneliness, whether by murder or love, form the spines of Kieślowski's stories. These characters fight not only the culture they live in but ever-present contingency: their hopes and plans have little more predictive value than a long-range weather forecast. As in his *No End*, in which he told three stories, each dependent on whether a character stepped on a train or not, Kieślowski has continued to be fascinated by the cavalier twists seemingly inconsequential events give to a life. His characters have little control over their lives and little chance of success even in small matters. Kieślowski's outlook may well be the gloomiest of any major director in Europe.

But what makes his work important is that he has invented a style that makes near-hopelessness exciting on a moment-by-moment-basis. Bringing to his fiction films the kind of tension found in nature documentaries depicting the moment-by-moment struggles of small animals or insects to survive, Kieślowski's films look and feel like no other film-maker's. He refuses the formulas of both the Eastern European art cinema and of Hollywood. His films are rhythmically rather like Ingmar Bergman's ascetic explorations in the period from *The Silence* through *The Passion of Anna*, but unlike Bergman's, they have little interest in reflexivity; his films are about people, not about movies.

Perhaps it is most accurate to describe Kieślowski's style as an antithesis to those classical fiction-film rhetorics in which each shot's job is to predict the next and in which the viewer is reassured by generic conventions that how the story is bound to end is predetermined. There is no clear way of predicting how a Kieślowski film (or even a Kieślowski scene or shot) will end; his camera follows, rather than leads, the actions of his often impulsive characters. In part Kieślowski's style derives from the documentary practice, born from necessity, of following rather than leading each "subject." But Kieślowski's shot structures and editing are not those of documentary, in which the cameraperson must stand back enough not to affect the subject, must frame loosely enough and with enough depth of field so that unexpected movement can be co-

*Peter Buchka, "Weitere Nachricht aus einem kaputten Land: Krzysztof Kieślowskis 'Kurzer Film ueber die Liebe'", *Sud-deutsche Zeitung*, 1 Juni, 1989.

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vered, and must use natural light. Rather, he has taken those elements of documentary that signal involvement with unpredictable, "live" people rather than with actors whose movements are blocked out in advance, and combined these elements with a rethought version of fiction film technique.

A Short Film about Killing looks the more radical of the two films. Certainly it is the more relentlessly pessimistic. Its structure is an intercutting of three stories: of a malicious young man who brutally murders a cabby; of the cabby; and of a law student facing exams, whose first case will be to defend that killer. The opening image announces the setting: a dead rat floats in a gutter in a grey concrete city under the dim yellow-brown light so common in an Eastern Europe fueled by high-sulfur coal. Then Kieślowski bluntly announces his theme: useless malice—a hanged cat dangles in a window. This theme will be played out several times: by a cabby, by a malicious killer, by the state. The presence of senseless malice ties the film together.

The story is low-mimetic and low-keyed. A cabby gets up in the morning, and begins to go about his day. A law student goes to take his final exam. And the "main" character, a young drifter, watches a beating in an alley, then goes about *his* day. He goes to a movie theater but is told the film is boring. He brings a snapshot to a photo shop to get it enlarged, and asks where he can get a cab. He walks to an overpass, and there, pushes a stone off a ledge. There is the sound of a car on the road below crashing, but he does not stop to watch. Malicious but with no goal for that malice, he goes to a square where cabs pick up fares. Frightened by the presence of cops, he goes to a cafe. There, he flirts through the window with a couple of little kids, wraps a cord around one hand, and leaves. He gets a cab, has the driver go into the countryside, strangles the driver with the cord, drags the body to a river, finds the driver still alive, smashes his head with a rock, and leaves. Following this senseless and brutal murder, the drifter drives around, lasting one night before he is caught. After that he has a trial, awaits execution, and is hanged. The drifter's story provides the spine of the narrative.

The second viewpoint is the victim's. The cabby washes his cab. A young couple want a ride; he takes off without them. He sees other potential customers: a woman with dogs; a homosexual, a drunk. He dodges them. He edgily avoids customers he does not want. But he is not simply mean: when he sees a stray dog, he gives the dog his sandwich. Eventually he picks up the young man. Once the young man begins to garrot him, the cabby struggles, as if forever, before he dies.

The third viewpoint, that of the law student, brings a humane perspective to the story. He takes his exam. The exam is one long confession of his problem with the law: the law is clear but circumstances are not; rules and reality conflict. Asked why he wants to be a lawyer, he replies that he wants to meet people he otherwise would never get to know. He passes his exam, and then he and his girlfriend go to a nearby cafe, where they talk about marriage. Later, the young lawyer's first case is to defend the killer. He loses. He visits the killer in death row. What bothers the lawyer most is that he remembers seeing the drifter in the cafe; that any diversion at that point could have changed the events that followed. The killer asks him to give the photo he had enlarged, a photo of a dead sister, to his mother, and explains that, but for an accident in which the sister was killed, after which he was kicked out of his family, his life could have been different. The lawyer observes the hanging, the carrying out of the state's malicious revenge, and leaves to grieve alone.

Of the three main characters, only the law student/lawyer would be in a movie by anyone but Kieślowski. The cabby is the jerk that city cabbies so often seem to be. He becomes truly sympathetic only when he struggles to breathe and pleads for his life. But that is part of Kieślowski's point: *anyone*

finally at the point of dying is someone we identify with, and cannot stand to see die. Similarly with the murderer. As we watch him cause a car accident, and even more as we watch him first strangle, then bludgeon the cabby's head, he is utterly despicable: anyone in the audience would vote for the death penalty after watching these scenes. But he becomes oddly sympathetic sitting in a cell, doomed, and then fully sympathetic when, struggling against the guards, he is manhandled, shoved into the noose, and dies, his sphincter muscle letting go of the contents of his guts down his pants leg as he dies. Like the lawyer, we may feel no sympathy for what he has done, but want no part of the execution. That society decreed the death is no matter: murder can be nothing but malicious. What the execution makes of the executioners is beyond tolerance.

To get at the psychological ambience of his film, Kieślowski resorts to old tools: vignetting, bled-out color, high contrast. He films the killer's story expressionistically: cameraman Slamomir Idziak filtered the edges of the frame with a yellow-brown net or gel. Though the drifter's face, especially in close-up, looks relatively normal (though somewhat washed-out) the rest of the image goes yellow-brown: the young man lives in a mental chemical smog. The cabby's story is less filtered but grayed-out, with color-drained settings. The lawyer's story is more "human" in its tones; though Kieślowski desaturates color here too, faces and textures—a wooden desk, a landscape—seem almost normal. Yet overall the film is a document about the nearly unbearable.

In contrast, *A Short Film about Love* is by turns comic and colorfully erotic; though nearly equally pessimistic about the setting of contemporary Poland, it is prettier to watch. The characters seem as lonely as those in *Killing*, but basically harmless. The protagonist, Tomek, was raised in an orphanage; he works in a post office and lives with his best friend's mother. From the friend (who is now in Syria) Tomek acquired not only the room but the hobby of spying on Magda, a thirtyish artist with an active love life, who lives across the courtyard. The film begins with Tomek stealing a high-powered telescope so he can watch Magda more closely. Watching, he falls in love, not as adults tend to, but like a schoolboy crush—turned on, jealous, puerile, prankish, and frustrated. To

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see her more often, he invents ruses to get her to come to his post office window, and takes a second job delivering milk to her apartment building. Eventually he confesses he has been watching her. Furious, she has a boyfriend beat Tomek up. But when she sees his bruised face, she relents and agrees to a date. They have tea. Tomek confesses he also has stolen some of her mail. Outraged, she gets him to come to her place. There, unable to control himself, he ejaculates as soon as she has put his hand on her. She laughs at him and tells him that is love: a selfish urge that makes a mess. Tomek goes home and slits his wrists, but lives, because his landlady finds him and gets an ambulance. But the moment Tomek leaves, Magda, torn by guilt, tries to contact Tomek to get him to return. She begins to pursue him: she goes to the post office; she makes inquiries of his landlady. Finding what he has done, she becomes obsessed with getting in touch with him. In *A Short Film about Love* eroticism is just one way in which the need to touch other people is expressed, but it is an inseparable part not only of Tomek's attraction to Magda (and later, perhaps, of her fascination with him) but also of the old landlady's attraction to Tomek. Made into spiritual shut-ins by the high-rise compartments in which they live and the bureaucracies in which they work, their attempts at love must necessarily be neurotic. But any attempt at love in Kieślowski's world is acceptable. Unlike films (such as *Peeping Tom* or *Rear Window*) in which there is something perverse about voyeurism, in Kieślowski's world the urge to watch is at least a result of the desire to share another's life, and a poten-

tial preliminary to making closer contact.

Kieślowski switched cameramen on *A Short Film about Love*, here working with Witold Adamek. Adamek lets color saturate; above all, he fills the film with bravura shot combinations, in which "fiction" setups are played against documentary techniques in order to create involvement. Adamek deos not care about shadow detail: his key lights are hard, hitting in pools and often leaving a lot of the screen dark. Rather than model noses and cheekbones prettily with soft fill lighting, Adamek often uses harsh spotlights from above and the side, letting actors move into and out of pools of light. How we see the characters thus varies from moment to moment: one instant, for example, Magda looks astonishingly pretty; the next, completely ordinary. As a result, our perceptions even of a straightforward scene become complicated: we are not allowed the constancy effect, the stabilizing of our perceptions which prolonged contact with a person in everyday life (or conventional movie lighting) normally provides.

Adamek's camera stays glued to the characters, with continual correction of the framing as the actors move. The actors seem to move freely, impulsively, giving the impression of not having been blocked for ease of filming. (There also seems to be little or no "cheating" of their positions or movements to get them into frames and dolly shots neatly.) In some shots the camera seems shoulder mounted (but not shaky); the camera stays with the characters as if *it* were a character, fighting to be in the right place to see, but without the axle-grease smoothness and technical *savoir faire* of mainstream cinema's silky camera moves. Adamek enhances the effects of his edgy struggle to stay on top of the action by using relatively long lenses, tight compositions, and shallow depths of field. Often, as in documentaries, objects get in the way of what we want to see, and Adamek must move around them. The objects (as in documentary) do not seem planted for effect but just part of the clutter of reality. The camera continually reframes, refocuses, and then cuts to a new, better vantage point. As in a documentary, Adamek foregrounds the struggle with real locations, with the impulsiveness that makes real people so hard to document, with the contingencies that give documentary-like presence to a moment.

But the camera work still echoes and alludes to the standard conventions of fiction film. In interior scenes (such as one in which Tomek and Magda sit down for tea) Kieślowski and Adamek shoot from something close to the usual positions. But instead of the usual procedures for handling these positions, Kieślowski and Adamek invent their own. Conventional camera positions save set-up and lighting time by shooting such a scene from beginning to end from two positions; in the edit, segments from each position ping-pong back and forth. But *A Short Film about Love* rarely repeats camera setups precisely; as if they were shooting a documentary in sequence, Kieślowski and Adamek keep shifting, hunting for a fresh frame and perspective for each moment. Sometimes shots and cutting rhythms are unpredictable. For example, in the scene in which Magda runs from the post office, frustrated and humiliated by another prank summons to get mail, Tomek follows, and calls after her, confessing it is his fault. The camera sweeps with Tomek, stopping only after he does. Kieślowski comes in close for Magda's angry reaction as she tells Tomek to disappear, goes in a wide shot with Tomek as he tells her he saw her cry last night, then into a series of varied shots as she reacts and he confesses he has watched her and that he loves her. But none of these camera positions or the cuts between them gives the sense that the scene was rehearsed and repeated for each camera position; the impression is of a spontaneous event, caught by a chance perception.

The film's most conventional visual element is its use of saturated reds. Tomek covers his scope with red cloth, Magda's bedspread and telephone are red, and she has red stick-ons on her door; her weaving also has red motifs. Red is Magda's color, a gesture of rebellion against the greyness of the world in which she lives. Unlike the other characters, her response to other people, to objects, to life is openly tactile and, despite her bitterness and cynicism, passionate. Her tactility, her potential for touching other people, feels especially seductive in the context of Kieślowski's gray Poland.

In the film's final scene, Magda sees a light in Tomek's room. She runs to the apartment, and asks to see Tomek. He is asleep. Magda reaches to touch his bandaged wrists. The landlady stops her, trying to protect him. Magda then goes to the telescope, looks at her apartment, and imagines herself the night she cried, but now with Tomek with

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her as a friend to comfort her. When touch is impossible, the voyeuristic imagination takes over. But that at least gives the hope that there might be touch again, and with touch, a future.

Like Bergman's work in the 1960s, Kieślowski's is about loneliness and the search for human contact, for touch. Unlike Bergman's characters, however, Kieślowski's struggle against more than inner angst: their society gives them little chance that contingency will work for rather than against them. Peter Buchka may well be right that Kieślowski's films are an autopsy of Poland. But they are hardly a writing off of Polish people. One by one Kieślowski's characters struggle for contact. They are not all malicious killers. A young lawyer befriends a doomed man and weeps at his death. A landlady treats a young man as if he were her own son. A woman forgives a young man for spying on her. Each of these tries to reach out, to find something decent to do. And in this reaching out Kieślowski finds some small hope for, if not Poland, at least some of its people.

As Kieślowski's producer remarked to Kieślowski when he received the first European film prize, "So long as there are directors like you, Poland is not yet lost." That may or may not be true. But Kieślowski has found a form to make the struggle for spiritual survival in such a land exciting. That struggle can be filmed by treating stories as if they were real, by treating characters as if they were people, by treating film as if it were always a document. In Kieślowski's world most characters do not have much chance of success. But their struggle! Kieślowski has shown us an exciting way to film struggle. And in this showing, perhaps he has opened a new path for film-makers who do not want to forget their respect for reality when making fiction films. CHARLES EIDSVIK

Freedom Is Paradise

Written and directed by Sergei Bodrov.

Held in Moscow in May of 1986, the Fifth Congress of the Film-makers' Association of the USSR* marked the beginning of a massive attempt to democratize and decentralize the monolithic Soviet film industry. Among the first concrete measures to be taken was the "de-shelving" of films which had been previously judged unacceptable and the rehabilitation of the generation of "damned film-makers" who had directed them. Some of these films, such as Alexander Askoldov's *The Commissar* (*Komisar*, 1967–87) and Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* (*Korotkie vstrechi*, 1967–87) had been locked away into vaults for as much as 20 years; others were the work of somewhat younger film-makers such as Alexander Sokurov (*Heartless Grief* [*Skorbnoe beschustvie*], 1983–86, *The Lonely Voice of a Man* [*Odinokij golos cheloveka*], 1978–87), and the Georgians Irakli Kvirikadze (*The Swimmer* [*Ploveta*], 1981–87) and Tengiz Babluani (*The Migration of Swallows* [*Poroliot vorobev*], 1979–87) whose careers had likewise been prevented from developing normally during the "years of stagnation" under Brezhnev. This first wave of "new" Soviet films which had until recently been prohibited from projection would rapidly become favorites on the international festival circuit, winning for example the Golden Bear, top prize of the 1987 Berlin Film Festival for Gleb Panfilov's *Tema* (1979–87), the Silver Bear of the 1988 Berlin Festival for Askoldov's *The Commissar*, the Special Jury Prize of the 1987 Cannes Festival for Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (*Pokajanie*, 1984–87), etc., and would occasion a major reevaluation of the modern Soviet cinema.

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A Short Film About Love

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the censors' vaults was Sergei Bodrov's *The Non-Professionals* (*Neprofessionali*, 1985–87) (also known as *The Amateurs*), of which the unlikely geographical provenance was the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan. The film told the story of a small group of young rock musicians touring the desolate Kazakh steppe in a rickety minibus, trying to get free meals in exchange for concerts in depressing old-age homes and run-down state farms. Shot on location in black and white, with non-actors playing most roles, *The Non-Professionals* takes the spiritual malaise of a generation deprived of a clear-cut role in society (a popular theme among "new wave" cinemas the world over, from the French "nouvelle vague" of the early sixties to the New York Independent Cinema of the eighties) out of the sophisticated urban universe which typically serves as its backdrop, and places it in the frightening vastness and austerity of the Central Asian steppes. Yet this unusual setting does not function only as a striking visualization of existential emptiness, but also as a concrete socioeconomic reality: the world throughout which the film's young protagonists meander is as austere in terms of goods, services, and infrastructure as it is visually. Hope nonetheless manifests itself towards the end of the film in the vague and melancholy feeling of solidarity which develops between the musicians and the residents of a home for the aged who are as isolated and marginalized as they are themselves.

The action of Bodrov's subsequent film *Freedom Is Paradise* (*S.E.R.—Svoboda eta rai*, 1989), although produced by the Mosfilm Studios in Moscow, likewise begins in Kazakhstan. The title refers to the acronym tatooed onto the hand of its 13-year-old hero Sacha Grigoriev whom we meet in a penal institution for minors in Alma-Ata (capital of Kazakhstan) as the film begins. By the time the opening credits have ended, Sacha has already effected the first of several jailbreaks. He gets caught and sent back to prison, escapes again, manages to discover the whereabouts of his father whom he has never met, and sets out alone on the 7,000 kilometer journey to the prison camp in the extreme north of Russia where the latter is serving time for an unspecified offense.

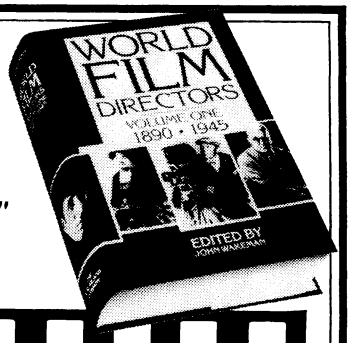
Among the most interesting aspects of Bodrov's work in general and of *Freedom Is Paradise* in particular is the soft-spokenly unconventional way in which narrative structure is developed. Whereas the classical realist narrative which has dominated both film and literature for the past 100 years is generally based on a linear succession of events within which each action is the logical consequence of the preceding one and which progresses cumulatively towards a climax, *Freedom Is Paradise* has a cyclical, episodic structure built around a series of loosely connected events which has more in common with "picaresque" literature of the seventeenth century (e.g., Cervantes's *Don Quichotte*, Rabelais's *Pantagruel*) than with the modern novel. Sacha's story is nonetheless "linear" in a strong and fairly literal sense of the term as he advances along the 7,000-kilometer line which traverses a continent from south to north. Yet this linearity is purely geographical: as the plot progresses, Sacha becomes gradually more adept at breaking out of prison, stealing what he needs to survive, and evading the authorities, but otherwise his character remains essentially unchanged from the beginning to the end of the film. We witness no ripening of a personality, no growth of awareness, no evolutionary character development of the type which we typically expect from a narrative.

A native of the Far East of Russia who was accustomed as a child to taking transcontinental train trips covering thousands of kilometers and lasting for as long as ten days, Bodrov has a particularly fine sense of the representation of distance and of its use as a central visual and dramatic element. By working with the simplest of forms—for example, the parallel lines formed by railroad tracks, doors,

windows, roads, prison bars, etc.—Bodrov succeeds in creating a highly personal sort of spatial lyricism which in *Freedom Is Paradise* is combined, through Sacha's vision, with stark, nearly documentary-like images of Soviet carceral life. Yet in contrast to what Peter Scarlet of the San Francisco Festival has called the "rub-your-nose-in-it-realism" of some recent Soviet films, the violence in *Freedom Is Paradise* is deliberately de-melodramatized. Bodrov uses neither close-ups of faces contorted by pain, nor red paint, to portray the ubiquitous brutality of Sacha's world. Rather, he puts the elements defining an overtly violent episode—the glitter of a knife, the open door of a shack, the brief exchange between two boys—into place, and then foregoes the naturalistic representation of the assault itself. Similarly, when Sacha is beaten up by a group of fellow inmates, the camera remains at a discrete distance from the dimly lit, nearly ritualistic fight.

The young Volodia Kozerev who incarnates Sacha was himself a reform-school inmate when Bodrov found him and chose him from among the 2,000 boys he had screened for the role. Bodrov, who had already demonstrated considerable skill for the selection and direction of non-actors in *The Non-Professionals* as well as in his first feature, *The Sweet Juice inside the Grass* (*Sladkij sok vnatri travu*, Kazakhfilm Studios, 1984), here manages to elicit a remarkably subtle performance from Kozerev from which histrionics, pathos, and endearing childish cuteness are totally absent. Clearly, his approach to character construction owes far less to the "method acting" propounded by Stanislavsky (Moscow Art Theater) and Strasberg (Actors' Studio) than to Eisenstein's principle of "typage." "Typage," Eisenstein insisted, did not simply mean "a face without make-up, or a substitution of 'naturally expressive' types for actors"; rather, it was part of a "specific approach to the events embraced by the content of the film," an approach which allowed for the development of "definite affinities to real life through the camera." ("Through Theater to Cinema," first published in 1934, reprinted in English in *Film Form*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949).

This commitment to the truthful portrayal of a reality which exists independently of the film's fictional universe emerges especially forcefully in the film's final episode, shot in a prison camp in the region of Archangelsk with real guards and prisoners appearing in their own roles. As the scene ends, the elder Grigoriev is led back to his cell, while the younger one is carted off in a prison truck, presumably back to the reform school in Alma-Ata where the film's action began. Significantly, Bodrov never tells us for what crime Sacha's father is currently in prison. But we learn during the course of his sole encounter with his son that he was born there. The young woman who would become his mother had been arrested for the theft of five cucumbers and sentenced to one year for each cucumber. Once in prison, someone—a guard or an inmate—got her pregnant. Clearly, the implications of this disturb-



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ing image of a trans-generational carcerality, of a class of human beings who are born and raised in prisons, who will acquire their vision of the world there, and who will continue being prisoners as adults with brief intervals of shaky relative "freedom," go far beyond the physical limits of actual penal institutions. As *Freedom Is Paradise* ends, we are left wondering whether society at large is not a prison. Where is the paradisical "freedom" of which Sacha dreams? Certainly, even in his adventures outside the prison, he has encountered only people living in various degrees of non-freedom. Is freedom, like paradise, non-existent? Perhaps. But while the fictional Sacha Grigoriev will presumably never break out of the cycle of imprisonment, escape, and recapture within which he appears to be trapped, the real-life Volodia Kozerev just might. Released on parole following the shooting of *Freedom Is Paradise* as a result of the filmmaker's intervention on his behalf, Kozerev is currently living with his mother outside of Moscow. In a rapidly changing Soviet Union, some of the better forms of "non-freedom" may soon become available to him.

BRENDA BOLLAG AND ROLAND POSNER

Berkeley in the Sixties

Produced and directed by Mark Kitchell. Cinematography: Stephen Lighthill. Editor: Veronica Selver. Kitchell Films, 2600 Tenth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710.

As a a participant in radical work in the sixties, I found this film better than I had feared it would be. Though it is structurally a simple-minded documentary, alternating talking heads with historical news footage, it's filled with enough memories to make initially appealing sense. Only upon a second look, and a listen to the sound track, does it become clear that it is also a musically literal, cinematically linear, and timidly liberal interpretation of the sixties.

The opening section, taking us from the first protests against the House Un-American Activities Committee's visit to San Francisco through Mario Savio's famous speech during the Berkeley campus Free Speech Movement, exaggerates the role of Berkeley students in the San Francisco events; San Francisco had had a strong old left for decades, in both labor and civil rights areas, and it was these people and their children (through SF CORE) that were mainly responsible for the first auto-row and hotel-discrimination actions. The narration by Susan Griffin, with text by Griffin, Kitchell, and Steve Most, is guilty of historical hubris here.

Nonetheless, the first 25 minutes of the film makes a sound connection between the southern Civil Rights experience and the northern campus civil-liberties issues of the FSM. The climax of this liberal, pre-radical section comes after Mario Savio is seen delivering his impassioned declaration:

> We don't mean to be made into any product, be that it government, industry, or organized labor. . . . There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even possibly take part, and you've got to put your bodies on the gears, upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop, and you got to indicate to the people who run it or who own it—that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

The radical feeling of Savio's words is immediately undercut by Joan Baez's warbling of "We Shall Overcome" as we see students lethargically walking up a staircase. Sit-in shots and demonstration shots, along with speeches by UC President Clark Kerr lead to the apex of the film's interpretation of this period: philosophy professor John Searle's recalling, "So when the faculty marched out into this cheering mob of students, we knew that that was it. We had achieved everything we had set out to achieve in FSM." To which Griffin's voice adds "Victory in our struggle for civil rights and free speech made us confident that we could change the course of history."

From this juncture onward, the film takes as its implicit task the dissecting of the radicals, the elimination of the Communists, and the ignoring of major figures in the Berkeley and Bay Area political scene who do not fit into the neat picture of campus protest. Searle (now a dean) considers that "the radicals had no program, vision, concrete program" while Ruth Rosen (now a professor) believes "we were beyond the Cold War." A student ob-

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Police and tear gas on Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley, 1968

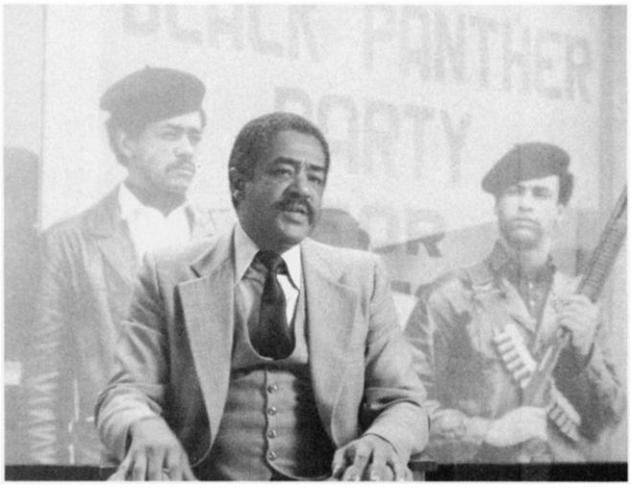
server named John Gage (now a corporate executive) serves as a kind of audience identification figure who felt "We were too far from the Newport Beach people I wanted to reach." By the end of the film the straight guys and gals come out ahead, all clean and tidy; there are no reds, no gays, no hippies, no freaks, no Trots. The film's timid proposition is that the system can only be fiddled with from within.

True, radical organizer Frank Bardacke is allowed some time on screen for less sanitized views, with a small assist from Jack Weinberg, but they are quickly buried under the "reasonableness" of the liberals' considered opinions. Omitted are major figures of the non-liberal left: Bettina Aptheker, influential Communist on the FSM steering committee; Bob Scheer, Vietnam War activist who ran for Congress; Ann Weils, feminist and communist, who organized troop-train stoppages; and well known figures including Michael Lerner, Jerry Rubin of the Vietnam Day Committee, Robert Hurwitt, even Ron Dellums (now Berkeley's congressman and then a radical city council member). There is no reference to the important role of KPFA-FM, which *did* broadcast the revolution, nor to the underground paper *The Berkeley Barb*, another critical institution of Berkeley in the sixties.

All of the above do not fit into the cast of scrubbed-up student activists, nor were they engaged only in civil liberties issues, and most important, none was above or beyond the Cold War. Most of the omitted figures supported the victory of the Vietcong. The "Wild in the Streets" activists though they could "bring the war home," and to some extent they did, but the only aspect of this that figures in the film, through Bardacke, was the attempt to close the draft board offices in neighboring Oakland.

The film's music is a further evidence of a tepid interpretation of the events chosen; it too eradicates any traces of the radical wild or chaotic in favor of a kind of liberal musical tourism. There *was* adventurous music in the sixties (Riley, Reich, Oliveros, Sobotnick, Sender, et al.) but all Kitchell and his academic advisors give us are sound-track pop, folk, and rock 'n' roll tunes that "illustrate" the visuals. The final lines by Griffin carry the authority of voice-over:

> Having gained the freedom to see the world freshly and the ability to act for change, we carried what we learned into the rest of our lives, from personal issues to planetary concerns, we continued to explore the potential for change. And, as we watch activists for human rights and democracy around the world challenge the powers that be, we know that each generation has the chance to make change and that no generation can do it alone.



Bobby Seal, interviewed in *Berkeley in the Sixties*

This statement, accompanied by the singing of good old safe Pete Seeger, could have been made by Jimmy Carter—or Gus Hall, for that matter, longtime head of the US Communist Party—both of whom were regarded as enemies by the New Left and by militants of every color: red (native American), black, brown, and white.

Where *The Big Chill* was Hollywood's corporate put-down of the rambunctious sixties, *Berkeley in the Sixties* is the academic liberals' interpretation without intellectual insight. (All of Kitchell's "advisors" were University of California faculty members: Leon Litwak, Todd Gitlin, Troy Duster, Ruth Rosen, Reginald Zelnick.) And while some might be thankful that they didn't try to support their simplistic sociological approach with deconstructive or semiological jargon, they could have used the more handy and historically appropriate cultural critique of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer—not to mention Leo Lowenthal, who still lives in Berkeley).

The radical objective of an historical analysis, after all, is to assess the past in order to understand successes and failures and sources of present conditions—to inform present and future actions. This film merely celebrates the very institutional and thought structures that the majority of "the movement" rebelled against. The sixties were far more disruptive than this film suggests. Not only were the students ready to break out, so were composers, painters, theater people, artists of all kinds along with young people of many colors who decided not to be tracked into jobs, home, and apple-pie roles. The period generated the women's movement, midwifery, alterative education projects, the environmental movement. Capitalism got its lumps, and the "brightest minds" were staying clear of the corporations. The rebelliousness and rejection of so many institutions and accepted rules of law and order were breathtaking and chaotic, sometimes downright messy and stupid. But it is a big mistake to elevate liberal campus civil liberties issues above resistance, bringing the war home, and other challenges to corporate society. In a country where selfishness and greed have become terminally entrenched, the sixties deserve honest remembrance as a time of mockery, love, sharing, nonconsumerism, and antiwar militancy, along with some adolescent chaos. Not an easy subject for a film, admittedly, but *Berkeley in the Sixties* is like a corpse on a life-support system. It's well preserved and brain dead.

R. G. DAVIS

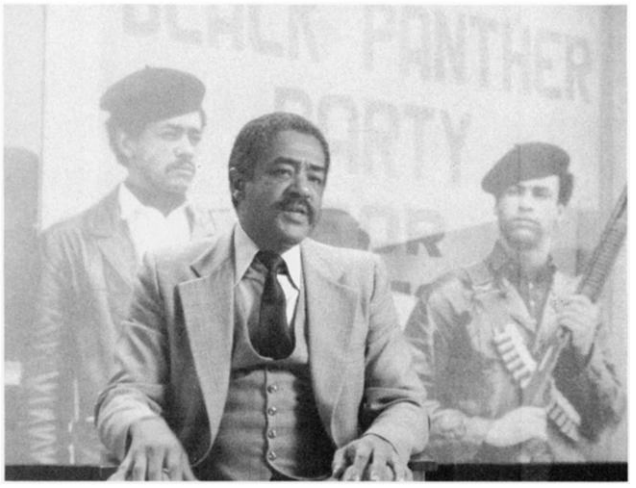
Books

Robert Altman: Jumping Off the Cliff

By Patrick McGilligan. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. $24.95

In the first edition of his study of contemporary American directors, *A Cinema of Loneliness* (1980), Robert Philip Kolker ends his chapter on Robert Altman, and his book, on a note of despair about "the prison that our contemporary cinema seems dead set on insisting we inhabit." But, he added, at least in Altman's films there was always the hope "that someone heard just outside the screen space, will call out loud and clear—'Bullshit!' " In his recent revision of the book, Kolker ends on a similar note, finding the same despair, better disguised, in American films of the 1980s. But he holds out a similar hope that in Altman's films "someone, even if it is a fictional surrogate for Richard Nixon, will raise his fist and call out loud and clear—'Fuck 'em!' "

The reference of course is to Altman's film on Nixon, *Secret Honor* (1984), in which that expletive



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The reference of course is to Altman's film on Nixon, *Secret Honor* (1984), in which that expletive

was indeed heard, and often. The transition from "Bullshit!" (the expletive that best expresses Altman's "bad attitude" in the 1970s) to "Fuck 'em!" is a marker not just of Altman's ever angrier take on contemporary culture, but also on the director's progressive marginalization within the American film industry, and the marginalization as well of hopes that directorial heroes of the seventies like Altman, Francis Coppola, and Martin Scorsese were forging a new language for a new generation of politically aware filmgoers. This didn't happen, and it remains to be determined if the fault was in our auteur-stars, or in ourselves, as Kolker, Robin Wood, and others have variously asserted.

Despite Altman's transition over the past decade from a critic's pet and bankable director of some much-spoken-of films to the expatriate *metteur-en-scène* of such fare as comes his way today (prestige TV and an occasional, barely released, movie), Robert Altman "keeps-a-goin'," as Patrick McGilligan concludes his massive, devotedly researched, and extremely impressive biography of this important director. While Francis Coppola, his cheeks presumably stinging from the shame of being dropped from Kolker's second edition, prepares to rejoin the mainstream with *Godfather III,* and Scorsese's Catholicism has emerged as the guiding light of his recent projects, Altman has stubbornly stuck to his last, pursuing his idiosyncratic psycho-political vision in such offbeat projects as the one-man Nixon film, an "unreleasable" teenage sex comedy (*O. C. & Stiggs*), and the almost-live cable serial *Tanner '88,* an insignificantly attended to blend of newsreel and comic strip which Altman created on the fly with *Doonesbury*'s Garry Trudeau. (It was as if the bitter, later Frank Capra of *State of the Union* had collaborated with the Walt Kelly of *Pogo.*)

Despite the fall from favor of auteur theory in both the academy and Hollywood, the 1980s have seen a number of impressive works on directors, and McGilligan's work joins them. In fact it's the one essential volume on Altman, the work which all other studies will have to refer back to. McGilligan does not accomplish this feat through his critical insights, not that he's devoid of them. Rather, he has produced a biography of record (like David Robinson's biography of Chaplin and Richard Schickel's of Griffith), instead of a critical study containing hitherto unknown biographical detail (in the manner of Tag Gallagher's book on John Ford and Peter Brunette's study of Rossellini). McGilligan has interviewed dozens of people who knew Altman, going back to his childhood and extending through the director's long, hitherto little documented apprenticeship in industrial documentaries and television. We get a complete overview of the production conditions Altman faced in both Kansas City (where he inserted dream sequences, long takes, and other Altmanesque touches into PR films for veterans, salesfolk, Caterpillar road equipment, and high school athletics) and in Hollywood as well.

Indeed, McGilligan is so thorough in documenting Altman's early career that the book is half over before Altman's breakthrough movie *M*A*S*H.* After several false starts and failed attempts to crash Hollywood, dating back to the 1940s (among them an extra's walk-on in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,* for which McGilligan obligingly provides a frame blow-up), Altman used a couple of ultra-low-budget features to escape Kansas City—only to spend ten frustrating years not shooting movies, as he yearned to do, but television instead: *Alfred Hitchcock Presents, The Millionaire, Bonanza, Bus Stop, Combat,* and *Kraft Television Theater*—the latter, Altman complained at the time, an anthology program "as bland as its cheese."

With all of its detailed research into this virgin turf for scholars, McGilligan's book becomes an instant classic in television studies. It has occasionally been asserted that series TV is the modern equivalent of the old Hollywood studios. Any future historian interested in testing this theory will have recourse to McGilligan's book. In a sense McGilligan's book is, for half its length, the first auteur study of a television director who, like a Ford or Hawks some thirty years earlier, schemed to make the product come out with some identifiable style.

At age 45, Altman got lucky. *M*A*S*H* was a surprise success, and not a fluky one for Altman either, as McGilligan demonstrates. Altman had for some years been trying to get similarly toned black humor projects off the ground, including the script that eventuated in Richard Lester's masterpiece *Petulia.* Suddenly bankable, Altman launched on the string of woozy, self-referential, semi-improvised commentaries on life that comprise the fifteen

films in ten years (from *M*A*S*H* to *Popeye*) that he is best known for. It is just at this point, however, when Altman becomes "Altman," that McGilligan's book begins to disappoint. Not that McGilligan doesn't cover all the bases: not only Altman's and his collaborators' on-set inspirations, but also the nitty-gritty of studio deals and backstage maneuvers.

Interesting as the material McGilligan gathers is, the author falls short of taking us inside the films, and Altman's film-making process, as he had with Altman's earlier career. The doors to Altman's imagination remain closed. While Altman's skill in drawing forth his actors and crews as collaborators is broached, the how and why remains enigmatic; it's difficult to see Altman's charisma in action when McGilligan is mostly elaborating on that charisma's dark side. McGilligan piles up the evidence of how Altman cut off old associates, wouldn't cooperate with even sympathetic producers, and was generally insistent on doing things "his way"—even if he has only a vague, unformed notion of just what "his way" consisted of.

But all this of course is merely the "dark side" of every self-made artist-hero (or "artist hero") from Mozart to Orson Welles—the latter an idol of Altman's so persuasive that Altman, it seems, has yearned to be a "martyr" like him all his life—and seems, to a degree, to have succeeded. McGilligan uncovers some hilarious details here: Altman imitating Welles's signature, Altman practicing Wellesian magic tricks. While McGilligan is certainly fair minded and decent in his approach, it could be argued that he spends too much time tracking down those Altman did wrong by, while, meanwhile, those he did right by aren't talking. In short, by omission (maybe Altman's friends' omission) McGilligan neglects most of Altman's "stock company" of performers in favor of disgruntled screenwriters Altman (chronically insecure about his writing ability, it would seem) tried to deprive of screen credit. Given McGilligan's interest in acting, demonstrated by his earlier work on James Cagney, this neglect of the stock company is surprising; maybe Shelley Duvall *et al.* just didn't want to talk. (Duvall did talk to McGilligan back when he was covering the making of *Popeye,* but a longer look back would seem necessary.)

Altman himself didn't talk to McGilligan, but didn't try to block his path, either. He remains an enigma today. McGilligan's final image of him is of an expatriate shorn of all but a tiny handful of loyal followers, making films when and where he can, unable to put the camera down. As good as it is, McGilligan's book works, unfortunately, to support the view that Altman's marginalization is primarily his own doing. A broader contextualization of Altman's career in its time might correct this image, which (like most artists' biographies) perhaps overvalues the control anybody has over his or her career. Books about Welles split between the camps of "It was/wasn't Orson's fault," but the book that needs to be written would emphasize that after the forties there just wasn't a place for someone of Welles's disturbing talent in Hollywood. Similarly, the ideal Altman biography would demonstrate how Altman existed at just the right place and time for his talents to be fully stretched. If not for the turmoil of the sixties and the resulting national disillusionment, Altman might never had made the breakthrough he sought; or if he had, his films might have been completely different.

In its attention to the details of Altman's career, McGilligan's book contains the outline of another book, a book that would have to pay more attention than McGilligan can, really, given the size of his enterprise, to the text and textures of Altman's films themselves. That book would demonstrate how Altman progressively alienated not the American audience (who, as McGilligan documents, never got the chance to see many of Altman's underpromoted films) but the more crucial combine of studio functionaries and movie reviewers. Altman —out of perverse pride, out of artistic integrity, or both—managed to simultaneously piss off both groups, who had been initial fans of his. (To his credit, McGilligan doesn't hesitate to name the names of a critical fraternity that became increasingly conformist and middle-brow as the seventies waned into the eighties.) The merchants and their client reviewers eventually combined to run Altman out of Hollywood, proclaiming *Popeye* the commercial failure it wasn't, and ensuring Altman the martyr's status he may have sought but didn't deserve.

This is not the critical Altman biography someone will someday write. McGilligan expressly dislikes some of Altman's more audacious projects (such as the to my mind brilliant *Quintet*), and he fails to hazard even a cursory explanation for what

he calls Altman's "female quartet of 'dream movies' "—the Altman movies that deal in their cryptic way with psycho-sexual madness. (This group includes *Images* and *3 Women,* but to them I would add such "male" films as *Streamers* and *Secret Honor.*) He essentially ignores the political dimension of Altman's work. But if McGilligan is not the ideal Altman critic, he appears to be the best biographer Altman can immediately hope for. McGilligan has written an invaluable book, and few works of screen scholarship have given me greater pleasure.

GREGG RICKMAN

Women Directors

The Emergence of a New Cinema

By Barbara Koenig Quart. New York: Praeger, 1988.

The pleasures of Quart's book on women's cinema are the pleasures of that phenomenon itself. Her subtle and provocative analyses of film upon film have a cumulative effect, immersing her reader in reflections upon a gender-defined or gender-distinguished experience of relationships, of family, of work, and of sexuality. Without forcing a thesis upon her wonderfully diverse subject, she allows a cohesiveness to emerge, justifying the book's subtitle. We begin to see that these films taken as a whole have provided cinema with a set of new metaphors, a new shorthand of images, as well as whole new categories of experience for exploration.

Such an ambitious project has required difficult choices. Quart chooses to focus upon narrative cinema in a "realist" tradition, a cinema she explains has been less examined by feminist film scholars, and which she believes is more practical than experimental cinema from a commercial standpoint, offering the widest potential impact upon film viewers. After a general introductory reflection upon these choices and upon the unifying themes she sees in the films examined, she offers a quick review of films by women directors up to the sixties. The bulk of the book then takes up more recent women's films, by geographical region: American; Western European; Eastern European; and Third World. (This last category is a sort of hodge-podge, including Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Latin American directors, as well as black film-makers from a variety of countries—a disappointing chapter compared to the preceding sections.)

Quart's text will be most useful as background reference or as an introductory overview of the field, though it lacks filmographies of the directors she mentions and her prose can be somewhat misleading, particularly for the reader who has not already seen the films.

More seriously, the book will disappoint the reader hoping for more than an intelligent, thematic encyclopedia of some of the most important films of recent women directors. Quart focuses her analysis on narrative structure, theme, and character development. The strength of this approach is in its ability to reveal thematic commonalities and shared emphases among the films examined. The drawbacks of the approach, however, are serious. To begin with, the decision to focus upon narrative films does not obviate the importance of cinematic form. Yet Quart's discussions, intelligent and sensitive as they are, read more like literary than film analysis. Her attention to imagery, camera movement, and *mise-en-scène* is minimal, denying her readers a major source of pleasure as well as insight.

Moreover, Quart's decision to organize her study by geopolitical region triggers a set of complex questions concerning the historical, social, and cultural influences and constraints acting upon women directors. But aside from the broadest generalizations concerning the competitive pressures of capitalism in the United States, or the pressures of political censorship on some Eastern European directors, for example, Quart does not explore these issues.

Finally, any study of films by women directors must confront two thorny questions: can this cinema be identified as a distinctly "feminine discourse"? and is this cinema "feminist"? Quart's response to these questions is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of her work. On the one hand, and I think admirably, she calls for a diverse and capacious understanding of women's cinema: [The films examined here] "constitute no one genre, and the 'female subject' here is indeed 'a site of differences' not to be 'again collapsed into a fixed identity, a sameness of all women as woman.' " (9) She explains that despite the frequency of certain themes (family, woman-woman relationships, importance of work,

he calls Altman's "female quartet of 'dream movies' "—the Altman movies that deal in their cryptic way with psycho-sexual madness. (This group includes *Images* and *3 Women,* but to them I would add such "male" films as *Streamers* and *Secret Honor.*) He essentially ignores the political dimension of Altman's work. But if McGilligan is not the ideal Altman critic, he appears to be the best biographer Altman can immediately hope for. McGilligan has written an invaluable book, and few works of screen scholarship have given me greater pleasure.

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Such an ambitious project has required difficult choices. Quart chooses to focus upon narrative cinema in a "realist" tradition, a cinema she explains has been less examined by feminist film scholars, and which she believes is more practical than experimental cinema from a commercial standpoint, offering the widest potential impact upon film viewers. After a general introductory reflection upon these choices and upon the unifying themes she sees in the films examined, she offers a quick review of films by women directors up to the sixties. The bulk of the book then takes up more recent women's films, by geographical region: American; Western European; Eastern European; and Third World. (This last category is a sort of hodge-podge, including Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Latin American directors, as well as black film-makers from a variety of countries—a disappointing chapter compared to the preceding sections.)

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More seriously, the book will disappoint the reader hoping for more than an intelligent, thematic encyclopedia of some of the most important films of recent women directors. Quart focuses her analysis on narrative structure, theme, and character development. The strength of this approach is in its ability to reveal thematic commonalities and shared emphases among the films examined. The drawbacks of the approach, however, are serious. To begin with, the decision to focus upon narrative films does not obviate the importance of cinematic form. Yet Quart's discussions, intelligent and sensitive as they are, read more like literary than film analysis. Her attention to imagery, camera movement, and *mise-en-scène* is minimal, denying her readers a major source of pleasure as well as insight.

Moreover, Quart's decision to organize her study by geopolitical region triggers a set of complex questions concerning the historical, social, and cultural influences and constraints acting upon women directors. But aside from the broadest generalizations concerning the competitive pressures of capitalism in the United States, or the pressures of political censorship on some Eastern European directors, for example, Quart does not explore these issues.

Finally, any study of films by women directors must confront two thorny questions: can this cinema be identified as a distinctly "feminine discourse"? and is this cinema "feminist"? Quart's response to these questions is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of her work. On the one hand, and I think admirably, she calls for a diverse and capacious understanding of women's cinema: [The films examined here] "constitute no one genre, and the 'female subject' here is indeed 'a site of differences' not to be 'again collapsed into a fixed identity, a sameness of all women as woman.' " (9) She explains that despite the frequency of certain themes (family, woman-woman relationships, importance of work,

etc.), women's cinema cannot be reduced to a unified voice. She issues a call: "Even if women often take the roles of victims in these directors' films . . . at a time when women's lives reflect a radical rethinking of gender roles, a turbulence and sense of possibility as in no other time in history, the full range of women's voices needs a hearing." (9)

But then, in her actual examinations of filmmakers, she repeatedly raises the question of a particular film's "feminism" quotient—defining feminism in the most narrowly ideological and ahistorical terms. In some instances, she uses a film's apparent non-feminist position as an implied reproach, while in other instances she uses such a position as evidence of the film-maker's transcendence of narrowly ideological statement. For example, Quart writes of Margarethe von Trotta, "Still, one is reluctant to call hers either a women's or a feminist cinema: she does far more than merely center on women characters, and yet, while she raises issues that are feminist, views women in ways one must call feminist, one hesitates to sum up her cinema with a word that suggests something ideological, programmatic (however appealing the ideology and the program) . . . One is grateful that von Trotta is too complex, too ambiguous, to fit into any ideology; that she draws her vision from deeper, wilder places—more paradoxical, irrational, intransigent sources. Hers is a women's cinema, *and* a feminist cinema, and more than these." (94)

Much as I appreciated the subtlety of Quart's individual analyses of the flms of von Trotta, or of Joyce Chopra's *Smooth Talk* for example, I was troubled by the inconsistency of her theoretical perspective and the dangerously loose implications of her working definition of "feminism." A whole generation of feminist film scholars have worked to ground their analysis in an active, particular questioning of ideology; a historically and politically conscious examination of individual film texts; an awareness of the interaction of film viewer, film industry, film-maker and film text. To imply that a film is "feminist" merely if women are not portrayed as victims, for example, is at best an oversimplification.

Nonetheless, despite the above criticisms, Quart's individual film analyses reveal an intelligence that is neither ahistoric nor reductionist in its view of cinema and feminism. It seems that she was the victim of her format—that in her effort to be comprehensive and to provide a sort of encyclopedic resource, she sacrificed the holistic perspective which would have revealed certain inconsistencies in her analysis. Although Quart is obviously neither simplistic nor unsophisticated in her analysis, she allows—or at worst encourages—her readers to be.

MARY GENTILE

Zero Mostel

A Biography

By Jared Brown. New York: Atheneum, 1989. $22.50

This nicely written and well-researched biography covers Mostel's career in all its phases: stand-up comic, actor, painter. If he relaxed into buffoonery at times in his career, it was a well-earned relaxation; as Brown points out, very few performers have risen as fast as Mostel did (he became a cabaret legend within a few months of his 1942 debut) or fallen so hard (blacklisted, and a crippling bus accident) only to recover so magnificently. Brown, a theater historian, emphasizes Mostel's stage performances, which is only fair as it is that career that was his glory. He has little to say about most of Mostel's films, either his early ones as a studio contract player or his later ones as a star. Brown doesn't even bother to name some of Mostel's unreleased vehicles of the late 1960s, although there is good material on the making of *The Producers* and *The Front.*

On the other hand, Brown excels in his detailing of Mostel's blacklisting, tracing the actor's progressive sympathies to the Jewish culture he grew up in, and calling the reader's attention to such forgotten controversies as a protest at MGM (which he joined as a contract player there) against the studio's 1942 film *Tennessee Johnson;* this biopic of President Andrew Johnson portrayed his foe, the abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens, too harshly for liberals to accept. (MGM retaliated by cutting Mostel's scenes in *DuBarry Was a Lady* and dropping his contract.) There are enough telling stories of the dark days of the 1950s reported here to make for another movie about the blacklist, better than the bland *The Front:* Mostel appearing (in a false beard) to cheer on a stage performance by Sam

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Jaffe, talking the petrified Jaffe into going on a second night when stage fright had driven him off the first; Mostel having the last word during his HUAC testimony; Mostel taking out his frustration in painting (much spoken of in the text, but little seen in the illustrations). Particularly interesting are the details of Mostel's relationship with "friendly" witness Elia Kazan, who threw Mostel some much needed work before his own testimony, a man who sought Mostel's forgiveness (and few others') afterit. "He didn't forgive," Brown quotes Gene Wilder as recalling. "He mellowed, but he didn't forgive. He may have had compassion for the people who informed because they were weak, but he didn't forgive." GREGG RICKMAN

How the War Was Remembered

Hollywood and Vietnam

By Albert Auster and Leonard Quart. New York: Praeger, 1988.

While there is a fairly large body of criticism on the literature spawned by the Vietnam War, there is still relatively little on films about the war and the legacy of Vietnam. Gilbert Adair's *Vietnam on Film* was poorly organized, lacking in critical focus, and notable largely for its stills. *How the War Was Remembered* therefore helps fill a serious gap, especially with the enormous number of films and television programs about the war.

The book's weakness is its attempt to be exhaustive as it covers a huge field; 171 pages is hardly enough for all the things Auster and Quart want to say about the various subgenres of the Vietnam film. Such topics as the veteran-as-psychopath deserve separate chapters, given the very convincing (if scant) remarks the authors make on a number of minor films which, as much as *The Green Berets* and *Apocalypse Now*, helped shape the popular perception of Vietnam.

And here is where Auster and Quart find their thesis. The common pursuit by critics and audiences of the most "realistic" Vietnam film is, for the authors, a delusion. Vietnam is, of course, unrepresentable; what Hollywood has offered are images from American mythology which, in various degrees, reinforce political prejudices. The book makes clear that the "Vietnam film" has seldom been about Vietnam either in terms of its people or the historical origins of the policies behind the war. Instead, the Vietnam film tends to recycle archetypal narratives about white, Anglo-Saxon supermen who make courageous journeys into an Asian heart of darkness to rescue civilization. This story is told optimistically (*The Green Berets*) or rather pessimistically (*The Deer Hunter*) depending on the national ideological temper at a given moment. A film such as *Rambo* could only exist because of the country's need to assure itself, under the Reagan government, that Vietnam was a "noble cause." Auster and Quart suggest that this need was always latent, especially given that the overwhelming majority of Vietnam films focus on American combatants and the American experience of the war. Moreover, when moral questions are raised in the Vietnam cinema they are almost always obscure and general humanitarian bromides rather than criticisms based on political and economic realities. The films of the 1980s which pretend to "confront" Vietnam from a grunt's-eye-view (*Platoon*) have more to do with romanticizing the soldier than questioning the US involvement in Southeast Asia.

A great virtue of Auster and Quart's book is its references to American war policies, its regular allusions to what was going on in Washington during the period represented in a particular film. The book's discussion of Hollywood's image of the veteran is enhanced by the author's mention of the Nixon/Kissinger "madman strategy" and similar policies far more psychotic than anything in the Hollywood cinema's notion of the moral schizophrenia surrounding Vietnam.

The scope of this book is large, and there is a good deal that could benefit from further development. Still, there is little question that *How the War Was Remembered* at present has the status of the definitive critical text on the Vietnam cinema.

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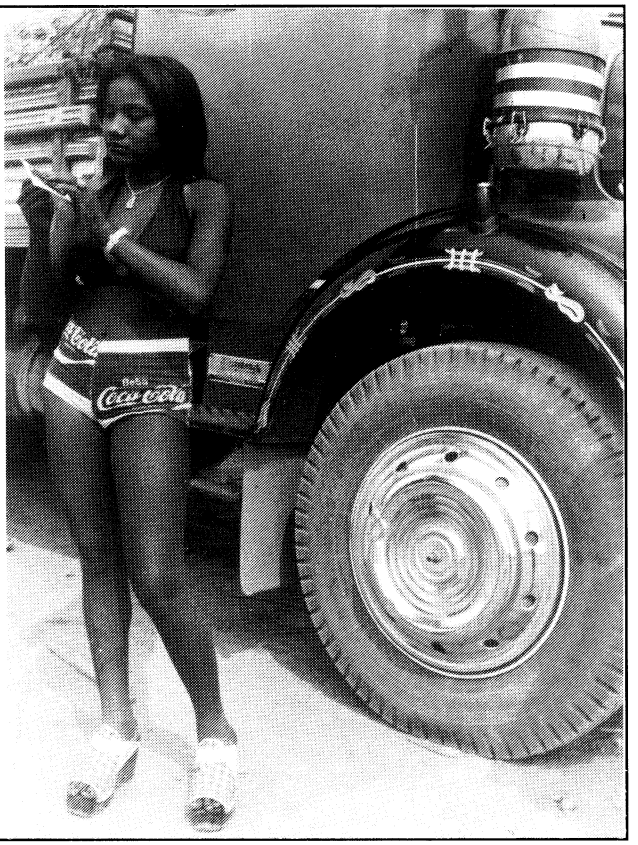

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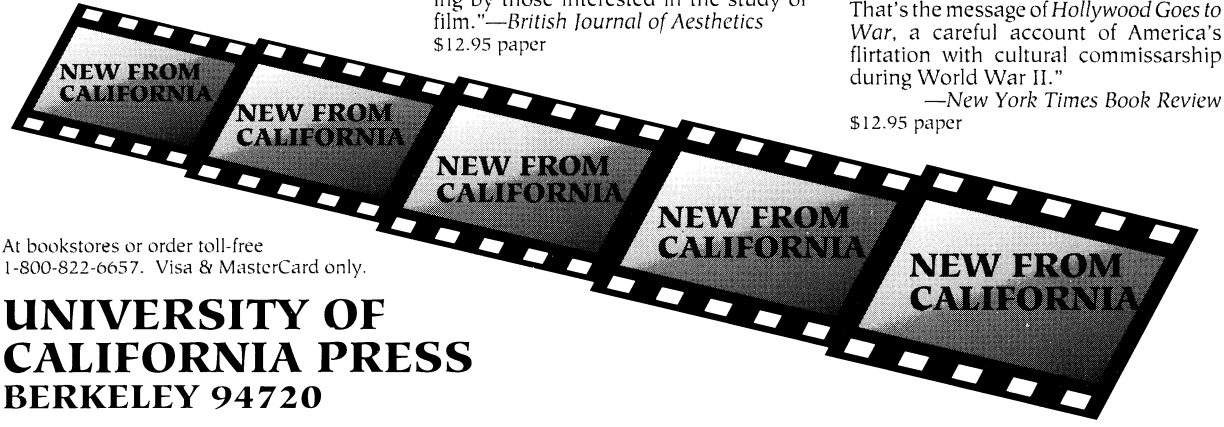

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